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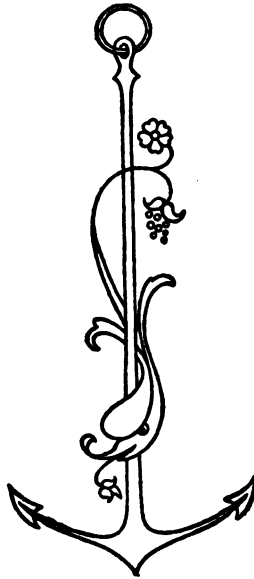
THE MYSTERY

BY

STEWART EDWARD WHITE

AND

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS



Illustrations by Will Crawford

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PART ONE
THE SEA RIDDLE

I

DESERT SEAS

THE late afternoon sky flaunted its splendour of blue and gold like a banner over the Pacific, across whose depths the trade wind droned in measured cadence. On the ocean's wide expanse a hulk wallowed sluggishly, the forgotten relict of a once brave and sightly ship, possibly the Sphinx of some untold ocean tragedy, she lay black and forbidding in the ordered procession of waves. Half a mile to the east of the derelict hovered a ship's cutter, the turn of her crew's heads speaking expectancy. As far again beyond, the United States cruiser *Wolverine* outlined her severe and trim silhouette against the horizon. In all the spread of wave and sky no other thing was visible. For this was one of the desert parts of the Pacific, three hundred miles north of the steamship route from Yokohama to Honolulu, five hundred miles from the nearest land, Gardner Island, and more than seven hundred northwest of the Hawaiian group.

On the cruiser's quarter-deck the officers lined the starboard rail. Their interest was focussed on the derelict.

"Looks like a heavy job," said Ives, one of the junior lieutenants. "These floaters that lie with deck almost awash will stand more hammering than a mud fort."

"Wish they'd let us put some six-inch shells into her," said Billy Edwards, the ensign, a wistful expression on his big round cheerful face. "I'd like to see what they would do."

"Nothing but waste a few hundred dollars of your Uncle Sam's money," observed Carter, the officer of the deck. "It takes placed charges inside and out for that kind of work."

"Barnett's the man for her then," said Ives. "He's no economist when it comes to getting results. There she goes!"

Without any particular haste, as it seemed to the watchers, the hulk was shouldered out of the water, as by some hidden leviathan. Its outlines melted into a black, outshowering mist, and from that mist leaped a giant. Up, up, he towered, tossed whirling arms a hundred feet abranched, shivered, and dissolved into a widespread cataract. The water below was lashed into fury, in the midst of which a mighty death agony beat back the troubled waves of the trade wind. Only then did the muffled double boom of the explosion reach the ears of the spectators, presently to be followed by a whispering, swift-skimming wavelet that swept irresistibly across the bigger surges and lapped the ship's side, as for a message that the work was done.

Here and there in the sea a glint of silver, a patch of purple, or dull red, or a glistening apparition of black showed where the unintended victims of the explosion, the gay-hued open-sea fish of the warm waters, had succumbed to the force of the shock. Of the intended victim there was no sign, save a few fragments of wood bobbing in a swirl of water.

When Barnett, the ordnance officer in charge of the destruction, returned to the ship, Carter complimented him.

"Good clean job, Barnett. She was a tough customer, too."

"What was she?" asked Ives.

"The *Caroline Lemp*, three-masted schooner. Anyone know about her?"

Ives turned to the ship's surgeon, Trendon, a grizzled and brief-spoken veteran, who had at his finger's tips all the lore of all the waters under the reign of the moon.

"What does the information bureau of the Seven Seas know about it?"

"Lost three years ago—spring of 1901—got into ice field off the tip of the Aleutians. Some of the crew froze. Others got ashore. Part of survivors accounted for. Others not. Say they've turned native. Don't know myself."

"The Aleutians!" exclaimed Billy Edwards. "Great Cats! What a drift! How many thousand miles would that be?"

"Not as far as many another derelict has wandered in her time, son," said Barnett.

The talk washed back and forth across the hulks of classic sea mysteries, new and old; of the *City of Boston*, which went down with all hands, leaving for record only a melancholy scrawl on a bit of board to meet the wondering eyes of a fisherman on the far Cornish coast; of the *Great Queensland*, which set out with five hundred and sixty-nine souls aboard, bound by a route unknown to a tragic end; of the *Naronic*,

with her silent and empty lifeboats alone left, drifting about the open sea, to hint at the story of her fate; of the *Huronian*, which, ten years later, on the same day and date, and hailing from the same port as the *Naronic*, went out into the void, leaving no trace; of Newfoundland captains who sailed, roaring with drink, under the arches of cathedral bergs, only to be prisoned, buried, and embalmed in the one icy embrace; of craft assailed by the terrible one-stroke lightning clouds of the Indian Ocean, found days after, stone blind, with their crews madly hauling at useless sheets, while the officers clawed the compass and shrieked; of burnings and piracies; of pest ships and slave ships, and ships mad for want of water; of whelming earthquake waves, and mysterious suction, drawing irresistibly against wind and steam power upon unknown currents; of stout hulks deserted in panic although sound and seaworthy; and of others so swiftly dragged down that there was no time for any to save himself; and of a hundred other strange, stirring and pitiful ventures such as make up the inevitable peril and incorrigible romance of the ocean. In a pause Billy Edwards said musingly:

"Well, there was the *Laughing Lass*."

"How did you happen to hit on her?" asked Barnett quickly.

"Why not, sir? It naturally came into my head. She was last seen somewhere about this part of the world, wasn't she?" After a moment's hesitation he added: "From something I heard ashore I judge we've a commission to keep a watch out for her as well as to destroy derelicts."

"What about the *Laughing Lass*?" asked McGuire, the paymaster, a New Englander, who had been in the service but a short time.

"Good Lord! don't you remember the *Laughing Lass* mystery and the disappearance of Doctor Schermerhorn?"

"Karl Augustus Schermerhorn, the man whose experiments to identify telepathy with the Marconi wireless waves made such a furore in the papers?"

"Oh, that was only a by-product of his mind. He was an original investigator in every line of physics and chemistry, besides most of the natural sciences," said Barnett. "The government is particularly interested in him because of his contributions to aerial photography."

"And he was lost with the *Laughing Lass*?"

"Nobody knows," said Edwards. "He left San Francisco two years ago on a hundred-foot schooner, with an assistant, a big brass-bound chest, and a ragamuffin crew. A newspaper man named Slade, who dropped out of the world about the same time, is supposed to have gone along, too. Their schooner was last sighted about 450 miles northeast of Oahu, in good shape, and bound westward. That's all the record of her that there is."

"Was that Ralph Slade?" asked Barnett.

"Yes. He was a free-lance writer and artist."

"I knew him well," said Barnett. "He was in our mess in the Philippine campaign, on the *North Dakota*. War correspondent then. It's strange that I never identified him before with the Slade of the *Laughing Lass*."

"What was the object of the voyage?" asked Ives.

"They were supposed to be after buried treasure," said Barnett.

"I've always thought it more likely that Doctor Schermerhorn was on a scientific expedition," said Edwards. "I knew the old boy, and he wasn't the sort to care a hoot in Sheol for treasure, buried or unburied."

"Every time a ship sets out from San Francisco without publishing to all the world just what her business is, all the world thinks it's one of those wild-goose hunts," observed Ives.

"Yes," agreed Barnett. "Flora and fauna of some unknown island would be much more in the Schermerhorn line of traffic. Not unlikely that some of the festive natives collected the unfortunate professor."

Various theories were advanced, withdrawn, refuted, defended, and the discussion carried them through the swift twilight into the darkness which had been hastened by a high-spreading canopy of storm-clouds. Abruptly from the crow's-nest came startling news for those desolate seas: "Light—ho! Two points on the port bow."

The lookout had given extra voice to it. It was plainly heard throughout the ship.

The group of officers stared in the direction indicated, but could see nothing. Presently Ives and Edwards, who were the keenest-sighted, made out a faint, suffused radiance. At the same time came a second hail from the crow's-nest.

"On deck, sir."

"Hello," responded Carter, the officer of the deck.

"There's a light here I can't make anything out of, sir."

"What's it like?"

"Sort of a queer general glow."

"General glow, indeed!" muttered Forsythe, among the group aft. "That fellow's got an imagination."

"Can't you describe it better than that?" called Carter.

"Don't make it out at all, sir. 'Tain't any regular and proper light. Looks like a lamp in a fog."

Among themselves the officers discussed it interestedly, as it grew plainer.

"Not unlike the electric glow above a city, seen from a distance," said Barnett, as it grew plainer.

"Yes: but the nearest electric-lighted city is some eight hundred miles away," objected Ives.

"Mirage, maybe," suggested Edwards.

"Pretty hard-working mirage, to cover that distance" said Ives. "Though I've seen 'em——"

"Great heavens! Look at that!" shouted Edwards.

A great shaft of pale brilliance shot up toward the zenith. Under it whirled a maelstrom of varied radiance, pale with distance, but marvellously beautiful. Forsythe passed them with a troubled face, on his way below to report, as his relief went up.

"The quartermaster reports the compass behaving queerly," he said.

Three minutes later the captain was on the bridge. The great ship had swung, and they were speeding

direct for the phenomenon. But within a few minutes the light had died out.

"Another sea mystery to add to our list," said Billy Edwards. "Did anyone ever see a show like that before? What do you think, Doc?"

"Humph!" grunted the veteran. "New to me. Volcanic, maybe."

II

THE LAUGHING LASS

THE falling of dusk on June the 3d found tired eyes aboard the *Wolverine*. Every officer in her complement had kept a private and personal lookout all day for some explanation of the previous night's phenomenon. All that rewarded them were a sky filmed with lofty clouds, and the holiday parade of the epauletted waves.

Nor did evening bring a repetition of that strange glow. Midnight found the late stayers still deep in the discussion.

"One thing is certain," said Ives. "It wasn't volcanic."

"Why so?" asked the paymaster.

"Because volcanoes are mostly stationary, and we headed due for that light."

"Yes; but did we keep headed?" said Barnett, who was navigating officer as well as ordnance officer, in a queer voice.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Edwards eagerly.

"After the light disappeared the compass kept on varying. The stars were hidden. There is no telling just where we were headed for some time."

"Then we might be fifty miles from the spot we aimed at."

"Hardly that," said the navigator. "We could guide her to some extent by the direction of wind and waves. If it was volcanic we ought certainly to have sighted it by now."

"Always some electricity' in volcanic eruptions," said Trendon. "Makes compass cut didoes. Seen it before."

"Where?" queried Carter.

"Off Martinique. Pelée eruption. Needle chased its tail like a kitten."

"Are there many volcanoes hereabouts?" somebody asked.

"We're in 162 west, 31 north, about," said Barnett. "No telling whether there are or not. There weren't at last accounts, but that's no evidence that there aren't some since. They come up in the night, these volcanic islands."

"Just cast an eye on the charts," said Billy Edwards. "Full of E. D.'s and P. D.'s all over the shop. Every one of 'em volcanic."

"E. D.'s and P. D.'s?" queried the paymaster.

"Existence doubtful, and position doubtful," explained the ensign. "Every time the skipper of one of these wandering trade ships gets a speck in his eye, he reports an island. If he really does bump into a rock he cuts in an arithmetic book for his latitude and longitude and lets it go at that. That's how the chart makers make a living, getting out new editions every few months."

"But it's a fact that these seas are constantly changing," said Barnett. "They're so little travelled that no one happens to be around to see an island born.

I don't suppose there's a part on the earth's surface more liable to seismic disturbances than this region."

"Seismic!" cried Billy Edwards, "I should say it was seismic! Why, when a native of one of these island groups sets his heart on a particular loaf of bread up his bread-fruit tree, he doesn't bother to climb after it. Just waits for some earthquake to happen along and shake it down to him."

"Good boy, Billy," said Dr. Trendon, approvingly. "Do another."

"It's a fact," said the ensign, heatedly. "Why, a couple of years back there was a trader here stocked up with a lot of belly-mixture in bottles. Thought he was going to make his pile because there'd been a colic epidemic in the islands the season before. Bottles were labelled 'Do not shake.' That settled his business. Might as well have marked 'em 'Keep frozen' in this part of the world. Fellow went broke."

"In any case," said Barnett, "such a glow as that we sighted last night I've never seen from any volcano."

"Nor I," said Trendon. "Don't prove it mightn't have been."

"I'll just bet the best dinner in San Francisco that it isn't," said Edwards.

"You're on," said Carter.

"Let me in," suggested Ives.

"And I'll take one of it," said McGuire.

"Come one, come all," said Edwards cheerily.

"I'll live high on the collective bad judgment of this outfit."

"To-night isn't likely to settle it, anyhow," said Ives. "I move we turn in."

Expectant minds do not lend themselves to sound slumber. All night the officers of the *Wolverine* slept on the verge of waking, but it was not until dawn that the cry of "Sail-ho!" sent them all hurrying to their clothes. Ordinarily officers of the U. S. Navy do not scuttle on deck like a crowd of curious schoolgirls, but all hands had been keyed to a high pitch over the elusive light, and the bet with Edwards now served as an excuse for the betrayal of unusual eagerness. Hence the quarter-deck was soon alive with men who were wont to be deep in dreams at that hour.

They found Carter, whose watch on deck it was, reprimanding the lookout.

"No, sir," the man was insisting, "she didn't show no light, sir. I'd 'a' sighted her an hour ago, sir, if she had."

"We shall see," said Carter grimly. "Who's your relief?"

"Sennett."

"Let him take your place. Go aloft, Sennett."

As the lookout, crestfallen and surly, went below, Barnett said in subdued tones:

"Upon my word, I shouldn't be surprised if the man were right. Certainly there's something queer about that hooker. Look how she handles herself."

The vessel was some three miles to windward. She was a schooner of the common two-masted Pacific type, but she was comporting herself in a manner uncommon on the Pacific, or any other ocean. Even as Barnett spoke, she heeled well over, and came rush-



A schooner comporting herself in a manner uncommon
on the Pacific

ing up into the wind, where she stood with all sails shaking. Slowly she paid off again, bearing away from them. Now she gathered full headway, yet edged little by little to windward again.

"Mighty queer tactics," muttered Edwards. "I think she's steering herself."

"Good thing she carries a weather helm," commented Ives, who was an expert on sailing rigs. "Most of that type do. Otherwise she'd have jibed her masts out, running loose that way."

Captain Parkinson appeared on deck and turned his glasses for a full minute on the strange schooner.

"Aloft there," he hailed the crow's-nest. "Do you make out anyone aboard?"

"No, sir," came the answer.

"Mr. Carter, have the chief quartermaster report on deck with the signal flags."

"Yes, sir."

"Aren't we going to run up to her?" asked McGuire, turning in surprise to Edwards.

"And take the risk of getting a hole punched in our pretty paint, with her running amuck that way? Not much!"

Up came the signal quartermaster to get his orders, and there ensued a one-sided conversation in the pregnant language of the sea.

"What ship is that?"

No answer.

"Are you in trouble?" asked the cruiser, and waited. The schooner showed a bare and silent main-peak.

"Heave to." Now Uncle Sam was giving orders.

But the other paid no heed.

"We'll make that a little more emphatic," said Captain Parkinson. A moment later there was the sharp crash of a gun and a shot went across the bows of the sailing vessel. Hastened by a flaw of wind that veered from the normal direction of the breeze the stranger made sharply to windward, as if to obey.

"Ah, there she comes," ran the comment along the cruiser's quarter-deck.

But the schooner, after standing for a moment, all flapping, answered another flaw, and went wide about on the opposite tack.

"Derelict," remarked Captain Parkinson. "She seems to be in good shape, too, Dr. Trendon!"

"Yes, sir." The surgeon went to the captain, and the others could hear his deep, abrupt utterance in reply to some question too low for their ears.

"Might be, sir. Beri-beri, maybe. More likely smallpox if anything of that kind. But *some* of 'em would be on deck."

"Whew! A plague ship!" said Billy Edwards. "Just my luck to be ordered to board her." He shivered slightly.

"Scared, Billy?" said Ives. Edwards had a record for daring which made this joke obvious enough to be safe.

"I wouldn't want to have my peculiar style of beauty spoiled by smallpox marks," said the ensign, with a smile on his homely, winning face. "And I've a hunch that that ship is not a lucky find for this ship."

"Then I've a hunch that your hunch is a wrong

one," said Ives. "How long would you guess that craft to be?"

They were now within a mile of the schooner. Edwards scrutinised her calculatingly.

"Eighty to ninety feet."

"Say 150 tons. And she's a two-masted schooner, isn't she?" continued Ives, insinuatingly.

"She certainly is."

"Well, I've a hunch that that ship is a lucky find for any ship, but particularly for this ship."

"Great Cæsar!" cried the ensign excitedly. "Do you think it's *her*?"

A buzz of electric interest went around the group. Every glass was raised; every eye strained toward her stern to read the name as she veered into the wind again. About she came. A sharp sigh of excited disappointment exhaled from the spectators. The name had been painted out.

"No go," breathed Edwards. "But I'll bet another dinner——"

"Mr. Edwards," called the captain. "You will take the second cutter, board that schooner, and make a full investigation."

"Yes, sir."

"Take your time. Don't come alongside until she is in the wind. Leave enough men aboard to handle her."

"Yes, sir."

The cruiser steamed to within half a mile of the aimless traveller, and the small boat put out. Not one of his fellows but envied the young ensign as he left the ship, steered by Timmins, a veteran bo's'n's mate,

wise in all the ins and outs of sea ways. They saw him board, neatly running the small boat under the schooner's counter; they saw the foresheet eased off and the ship run up into the wind; then the foresail dropped and the wheel lashed so that she would stand so. They awaited the reappearance of Edwards and the bo's'n's mate when they had vanished below decks, and with an intensity of eagerness they followed the return of the small boat.

Billy Edwards's face as he came on deck was a study. It was alight with excitement; yet between the eyes two deep wrinkles of puzzlement quivered. Such a face the mathematician bends above his paper when some obstructive factor arises between him and his solution.

"Well, sir?" There was a hint of effort at restraint in the captain's voice.

"She's the *Laughing Lass*, sir. Everything ship-shape, but not a soul aboard."

"Come below, Mr. Edwards," said the captain. And they went, leaving behind them a boiling cauldron of theory and conjecture.

III

THE DEATH SHIP

BILLY EDWARDS came on deck with a line of irritation right-angling the furrows between his eyes.

"Go ahead," the quarter-deck bade him, seeing him aflush with information.

"The captain won't believe me," blurted out Edwards.

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Barnett, smiling.

"It certainly is," replied the younger man seriously.

"I don't know that I blame him. I'd hardly believe it myself if I hadn't——"

"Oh, go on. Out with it. Give us the facts. Never mind your credibility."

"The facts are that there lies the *Laughing Lass*, a little weather-worn, but sound as a dollar, and not a living being aboard of her. Her boats are all there. Everything's in good condition, though none too orderly. Pitcher half full of fresh water in the rack. Sails all O. K. Ashes of the galley fire still warm. I tell you, gentlemen, that ship hasn't been deserted more than a couple of days at the outside."

"Are you sure all the boats are there?" asked Ives.

"Dory, dingy, and two surf boats. Isn't that enough?"

"Plenty."

"Been over her, inside and out. No sign of collision. No leak. No anything, except that the starboard side is blistered a bit. No evidence of fire anywhere else. I tell you," said Billy Edwards pathetically, "it's given me a headache."

"Perhaps it's one of those cases of panic that Forsythe spoke of the other night," said Ives. "The crew got frightened at something and ran away, with the devil after them."

"But crews don't just step out and run around the corner and hide, when they're scared," objected Barnett.

"That's true, too," assented Ives. "Well, perhaps that volcanic eruption jarred them so that they jumped for it."

"Pretty wild theory, that," said Edwards.

"No wilder than the facts, as you give them," was the retort.

"That's so," admitted the ensign gloomily.

"But how about pestilence?" suggested Barnett.

"Maybe they died fast and the last survivor, after the bodies of the rest were overboard, got delirious and jumped after them."

"Not if the galley fire was hot," said Dr. Trendon, briefly. "No; pestilence doesn't work that way."

"Did you look at the wheel, Billy?" asked Ives.

"Did I! There's another thing. Wheel's all right, but compass is no good at all. It's regularly bewitched."

"What about the log, then?"

"Couldn't find it anywhere. Hunted high, low, jack, and the game; everywhere except in the big,

brass-bound chest I found in the captain's cabin. Couldn't break into that."

"Dr. Schermerhorn's chest!" exclaimed Barnett. "Then he was aboard."

"Well, he isn't aboard now," said the ensign grimly. "Not in the flesh. And that's all," he added suddenly.

"No; it isn't all," said Barnett gently. "There's something else. Captain's orders?"

"Oh, no. Captain Parkinson doesn't take enough stock in my report to tell me to withhold anything," said Edwards, with a trace of bitterness in his voice. "It's nothing that I believe myself, anyhow."

"Give *us* a chance to believe it," said Ives.

"Well," said the ensign hesitantly, "there's a sort of atmosphere about that schooner that's almost uncanny."

"Oh, you had the shudders before you were ordered to board," bantered Ives.

"I know it. I'd have thought it was one of those fool presentiments if I were the only one to feel it. But the men were affected, too. They kept together like frightened sheep. And I heard one say to another: 'Hey, Boney, d'you feel like someone was a-buzzin' your nerves like a fiddle-string?' Now," demanded Edwards plaintively, "what right has a jackie to have nerves?"

"That's strange enough about the compass," said Barnett slowly. "Ours is all right again. The schooner must have been so near the electric disturbance that her instruments were permanently deranged."

"That would lend weight to the volcanic theory," said Carter.

"So the captain didn't take kindly to your go-look-see?" questioned Ives of Edwards.

"As good as told me I'd missed the point of the thing," said the ensign, flushing. "Perhaps he can make more of it himself. At any rate, he's going to try. Here he is now."

"Dr. Trendon," said the captain, appearing. "You will please to go with me to the schooner."

"Yes, sir," said the surgeon, rising from his chair with such alacrity as to draw from Ives the sardonic comment:

"Why, I actually believe old Trendon is excited."

For two hours after the departure of the captain and Trendon there were dull times on the quarter-deck of the *Wolverine*. Then the surgeon came back to them.

"Billy was right," he said.

"But he didn't tell us anything," cried Ives. "He didn't clear up the mystery."

"That's what," said Trendon. "One thing Billy said," he added, waxing unusually prolix for him, "was truer than maybe he knew."

"Thanks," murmured the ensign. "What was that?"

"You said 'Not a living being aboard.' Exact words, hey?"

"Well, what of it?" exclaimed the ensign excitedly. "You don't mean you found dead——?"

"Keep your temperature down, my boy. No. You were exactly right. Not a living being aboard."

"Thanks for nothing," retorted the ensign.

"Neither human nor other," pursued Trendon.

"What!"

"Food scattered around the galley. Crumbs on the mess table. Ever see a wooden ship without cockroaches?"

"Never particularly investigated the matter."

"Don't believe such a thing exists," said Ives.

"Not a cockroach on the *Laughing Lass*. Ever know of an old hooker that wasn't overrun with rats?"

"No; nor anyone else. Not above water."

"Found a dozen dead rats. No sound or sign of a live one on the *Laughing Lass*. No rats, no mice. No bugs. Gentlemen, the *Laughing Lass* is a charnel ship."

"No wonder Billy's tender nerves went wrong," said Ives, with irrepressible flippancy. "She's probably haunted by cockroach wraiths."

"He'll have a chance to see," said Trendon. "Captain's going to put him in charge."

"By way of apology, then," said Barnett. "That's pretty square."

"Captain Parkinson wishes to see you in his cabin, Mr. Edwards," said an orderly, coming in.

"A pleasant voyage, Captain Billy," said Ives. "Sing out if the goblins git yer."

Fifteen minutes later Ensign Edwards, with a quartermaster, Timmins, the bo's'n's mate, and a crew, was heading a straight course toward his first command, with instructions to "keep company and watch for signals"; and intention to break into the brass-

bound chest and ferret out what clue lay there, if it took dynamite. As he boarded, Barnett and Trendon, with both of whom the lad was a favourite, came to a sinister conclusion.

"It's poison, I suppose," said the first officer.

"And a mighty subtle sort," agreed Trendon.
"Don't like the looks of it." He shook a solemn head.
"Don't like it for a damn."

IV

THE SECOND PRIZE CREW

IN semi-tropic Pacific weather the unexpected so seldom happens as to be a negligible quantity. The *Wolverine* met with it on June 5th. From some unaccountable source in that realm of the heaven-scouring trades came a heavy mist. Possibly volcanic action, deranging by its electric and gaseous outpourings the normal course of the winds, had given birth to it. Be that as it may, it swept down upon the cruiser, thickening as it approached, until presently it had spread a curtain between the warship and its charge. The wind died. Until after fall of night the *Wolverine* moved slowly, bellowing for the schooner, but got no reply. Once they thought they heard a distant shout of response, but there was no repetition.

"Probably doesn't carry any fog horn," said Carter bitterly, voicing a general uneasiness.

"No log; compass crazy; without fog signal; I don't like that craft. Barnett ought to have been ordered to blow the damned thing up, as a peril to the high seas."

"We'll pick her up in the morning, surely," said Forsythe. "This can't last for ever."

Nor did it last long. An hour before midnight a pounding shower fell, lashing the sea into phosphorescent whiteness. It ceased, and with the growl of a

leaping animal a squall furiously beset the ship. Soon the great steel body was plunging and heaving in the billows. It was a gloomy company about the ward-room table. Upon each and all hung an oppression of spirit. Captain Parkinson came from his cabin and went on deck. Constitutionally he was a nervous and pessimistic man with a fixed belief in the conspiracy of events, banded for the undoing of him and his. Blind or dubious conditions racked his soul, but real danger found him not only prepared, but even eager. Now his face was a picture of foreboding.

"Parky looks as if Davy Jones was pulling on his string," observed the flippant Ives to his neighbour.

"Worrying about the schooner. Hope Billy Edwards saw or heard or felt that squall coming," replied Forsythe, giving expression to the anxiety that all felt.

"He's a good sailor man," said Ives, "and that's a staunch little schooner, by the way she handled herself."

"Oh, it will be all right," said Carter confidently. "The wind's moderating now."

"But there's no telling how far out of the course this may have blown him."

Barnett came down, dripping.

"Anything new?" asked Dr. Trendon.

The navigating officer shook his head.

"Nothing. But the captain's in a state of mind," he said.

"What's wrong with him?"

"The schooner. Seems possessed with the notion that there's something wrong with her."

"Aren't you feeling a little that way yourself?" said Forsythe. "I am. I'll take a look around before I turn in."

He left behind him a silent crowd. His return was prompt and swift.

"Come on deck," he said.

Every man leaped as to an order. There was that in Forsythe's voice which stung. The weather had cleared somewhat, though scudding wrack still blew across them to the westward. The ship rolled heavily. Of the sea naught was visible except the arching waves, but in the sky they beheld again, with a sickening sense of disaster, that pale and lovely glow which had so bewildered them two nights before.

"The aurora!" cried McGuire, the paymaster.

"Oh, certainly," replied Ives, with sarcasm. "Dead in the west. Common spot for the aurora. Particularly on the edge of the South Seas, where they are thick!"

"Then what is it?"

Nobody had an answer. Carter hastened forward and returned to report.

"It's electrical anyway," said Carter. "The compass is queer again."

"Edwards ought to be close to the solution of it," ventured Ives. "This gale should have blown him just about to the centre of interest."

"If only he isn't involved in it," said Carter anxiously.

"What could there be to involve him?" asked McGuire.

"I don't know," said Carter slowly. "Somehow

I feel as if the desertion of the schooner was in some formidable manner connected with that light."

For perhaps fifteen minutes the glow continued. It seemed to be nearer at hand than on the former sighting; but it took no comprehensible form. Then it died away and all was blackness again. But the officers of the *Wolverine* had long been in troubled slumber before the sensitive compass regained its exact balance, and with the shifting wind to mislead her, the cruiser had wandered, by morning, no man might know how far from her course.

All day long of June 6th the *Wolverine*, baffled by patches of mist and moving rain-squalls, patrolled the empty seas without sighting the lost schooner. The evening brought an envelope of fog again, and presently a light breeze came up from the north. An hour of it had failed to disperse the mist, when there was borne down to the warship a flapping sound as of great wings. The flapping grew louder—waned—ceased—and from the lookout came a hail.

"Ship's lights three points on the starboard quarter."

"What do you make it out to be?" came the query from below.

"Green light's all I can see, sir." There was a pause.

"There's her port light, now. Looks to be turning and bearing down on us, sir. Coming dead for us"—the man's voice rose—"close aboard; less'n two ship's lengths away!"

As for a prearranged scene, the fog-curtain parted. There loomed silently and swiftly the *Laughing Lass*.

Down she bore upon the greater vessel until it seemed as if she must ram; but all the time she was veering to windward, and now she ran into the wind with a castanet rattle of sails. So close aboard was she that the eager eyes of Uncle Sam's men peered down upon her empty decks—for she was void of life.

Behind the cruiser's blanketing she paid off very slowly, but presently caught the breeze full and again whitened the water at her prow. Forgetting regulations, Ives hailed loudly:

"Ahoy, *Laughing Lass*! Ahoy, Billy Edwards!"

No sound, no animate motion came from aboard that apparition, as she fell astern. A shudder of horror ran across the *Wolverine's* quarter-deck. A wraith ship, peopled with skeletons, would have been less dreadful to their sight than the brisk and active desolation of the heeling schooner.

"Been deserted since early last night," said Trendon hoarsely.

"How can you tell that?" asked Barnett.

"Both sails reefed down. Ready for that squall. Been no weather since to call for reefs. Must have quit her during the squall."

"Then they jumped," cried Carter, "for I saw her boats. It isn't believable."

"Neither was the other," said Trendon grimly.

A hurried succession of orders stopped further discussion for the time. Ives was sent aboard the schooner to lower sail and report. He came back with a staggering dearth of information. The boats were all there; the ship was intact—as intact as when Billy Edwards had taken charge—but the cheery, lovable

ensign and his men had vanished without trace or clue. As to the how or the wherefore they might rack their brains without guessing. There was the beginning of a log in the ensign's handwriting, which Ives had found with high excitement and read with bitter disappointment.

"Had squall from northeast," it ran. "Double reefed her and she took it nicely. Seems a seaworthy, quick ship. Further search for log. No result. Have ordered one of crew who is a bit of a mechanic to work at the brass-bound chest till he gets it open. He reports marks on the lock as if somebody had been trying to pick it before him."

There was no further entry.

"Dr. Trendon is right," said Barnett. "Whatever happened—and God only knows what it could have been—it happened just after the squall."

"Just about the time of the strange glow," cried Ives.

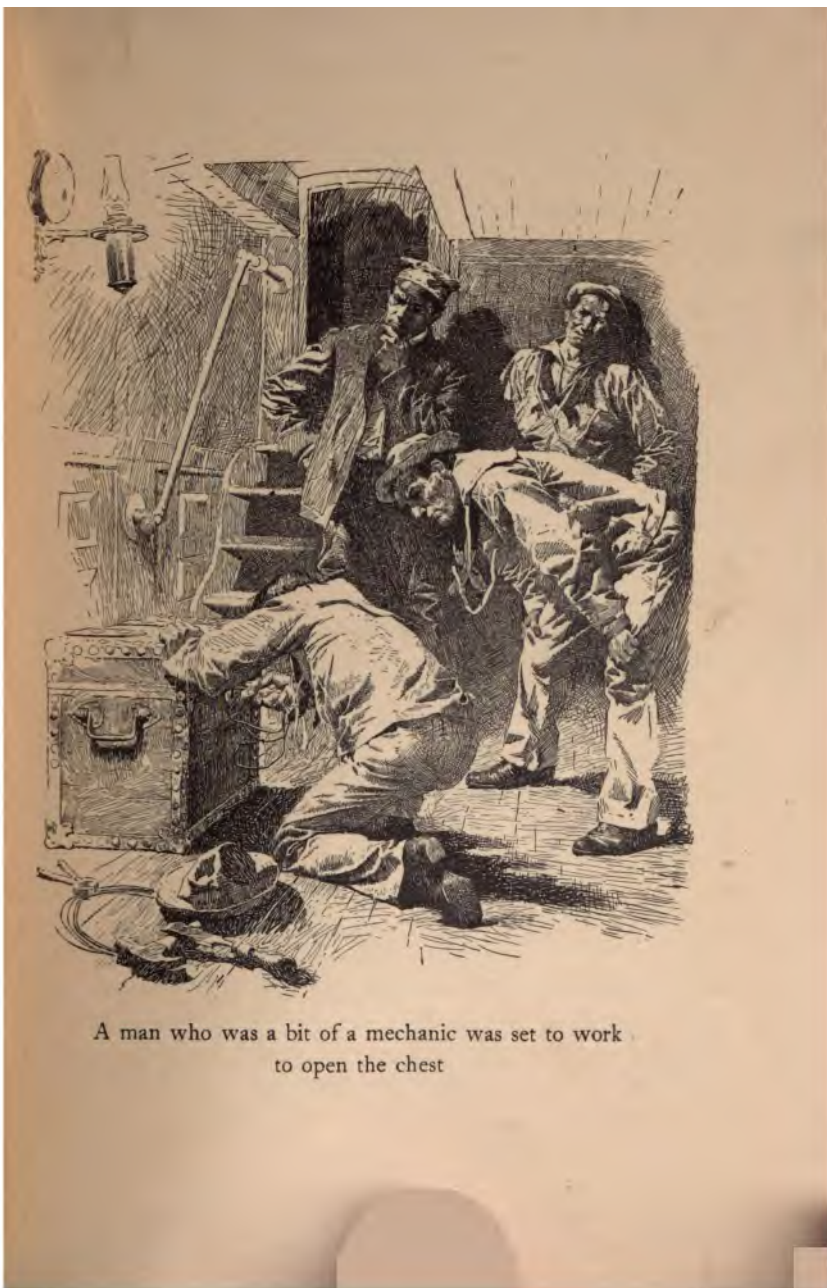
It was decided that two men and a petty officer should be sent aboard the *Laughing Lass* to make her fast with a cable, and remain on board over night. But when the order was given the men hung back. One of them protested brokenly that he was sick. Trendon, after examination, reported to the captain.

"Case of blue funk, sir. Might as well be sick. Good for nothing. Others aren't much better."

"Who was to be in charge?"

"Congdon," replied the doctor, naming one of the petty officers.

"He's my coxswain," said Captain Parkinson. "A



A man who was a bit of a mechanic was set to work
to open the chest

first-class man. I can hardly believe that he is afraid. We'll see."

Congdon was sent for.

"You're ordered aboard the schooner for the night, Congdon," said the captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any reason why you do not wish to go?"

The man hesitated, looking miserable. Finally he blurted out, not without a certain dignity:

"I obey orders, sir."

"Speak out, my man," urged the captain kindly.

"Well, sir: it's Mr. Edwards, then. You couldn't scare him off a ship, sir, unless it was something—something——"

He stopped, failing of the word.

"You know what Mr. Edwards was, sir, for pluck," he concluded.

"*Was!*" cried the captain sharply. "What do you mean?"

"The schooner got him, sir. You don't make no doubt of that, do you, sir?" The man spoke in a hushed voice, with a shrinking glance back of him.

"Will you go aboard under Mr. Ives?"

"Anywhere my officer goes I'll go, and gladly, sir."

Ives was sent aboard in charge. For that night, in a light breeze, the two ships lay close together, the schooner riding jauntily astern. But not until morning illumined the world of waters did the *Wolverine's* people feel confident that the *Laughing Lass* would not vanish away from their ken like a shape of the mist.

V.

THE DISAPPEARANCE

WHEN Barnett come on deck very early in the morning of June 7th, he found Dr. Trendon already up and staring moodily out at the *Laughing Lass*. As the night was calm the tow had made fair time toward their port in the Hawaiian group. The surgeon was muttering something which seemed to Barnett to be in a foreign tongue.

"Thought out any clue, doctor?" asked the first officer.

"*Petit Chel*—Pshaw! *Jolie Celimene*! No," muttered Trendon. "*Marie—Marie*—I've got it! The *Marie Celeste*."

"Got what? What about her?"

"Parallel case," said Trendon. "Sailed from New York back in the seventies. Seven weeks out was found derelict. Everything in perfect order. Captain's wife's hem on the machine. Boats all accounted for. No sign of struggle. Log written to within forty-eight hours."

"What became of the crew?"

"Wish I could tell you. Might help to unravel our tangle." He shook his head in sudden, unwonted passion.

"Evidently there's something criminal in her record," said Barnett, frowning at the fusty schooner astern. "Otherwise the name wouldn't be painted out."

"Painted out long ago. See how rusty it is. Schermerhorn's work maybe," replied Trendon. "Secret expedition, remember."

"In the name of wonders, why should he do it?"

"Secret expedition, wasn't it?"

"Um-ah; that's true," said the other thoughtfully. "It's quite possible."

"Captain wishes to see both of you gentlemen in the ward room, if you please," came a message.

Below they found all the officers gathered. Captain Parkinson was pacing up and down in ill-controlled agitation.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we are facing a problem which, so far as I know, is without parallel. It is my intention to bring the schooner which we have in tow to port at Honolulu. In the present unsettled weather we cannot continue to tow her. I wish two officers to take charge. Under the circumstances I shall issue no orders. The duty must be voluntary."

Instantly every man, from the veteran Trendon to the youthful paymaster, volunteered.

"That is what I expected," said Captain Parkinson quietly. "But I have still a word to say. I make no doubt in my own mind that the schooner has twice been beset by the gravest of perils. Nothing less would have driven Mr. Edwards from his post. All of us who know him will appreciate that. Nor can I free myself from the darkest forebodings as to his fate and that of his companions. But as to the nature of the peril I am unable to make any conjecture worthy of consideration. Has anyone a theory to offer?"

There was a dead silence.

"Mr. Barnett? Dr. Trendon? Mr. Ives?"

"Is there not possibly some connection between the unexplained light which we have twice seen, and the double desertion of the ship?" suggested the first officer, after a pause.

"I have asked myself that over and over. Whatever the source of the light and however near to it the schooner may have been, she is evidently unharmed."

"Yes, sir," said Barnett. "That seems to vitiate that explanation."

"I thank you, gentlemen, for the promptitude of your offers," continued the captain. "In this respect you make my duty the more difficult. I shall accept Mr. Ives because of his familiarity with sailing craft and with these seas." His eyes ranged the group.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Parkinson," eagerly put in the paymaster, "but I've handled a schooner yacht for several years and I'd appreciate the chance of——"

"Very well, Mr. McGuire, you shall be the second in command."

"Thank you, sir."

"You gentlemen will pick a volunteer crew and go aboard at once. Spare no effort to find records of the schooner's cruise. Keep in company and watch for signals. Report at once any discovery or unusual incident, however slight."

Not so easily was a crew obtained. Having in mind the excusable superstition of the men, Captain Parkinson was unwilling to compel any of them to the duty.

Awed by the mystery of their mates' disappearance, the sailors hung back. Finally by temptation of extra prize money, a complement was made up.

At ten o'clock of a puffy, mist-laden morning a new and strong crew of nine men boarded the *Laughing Lass*. There were no farewells among the officers. Forebodings weighed too heavy for such open expression.

All the fates of weather seemed to combine to part the schooner from her convoy. As before, the fog fell, only to be succeeded by squally rain-showers that cut out the vista into a checkerboard pattern of visible sea and impenetrable greyness. Before evening the *Laughing Lass*, making slow way through the mists, had become separated by a league of waves from the cruiser. One glimpse of her between mist areas the *Wolverines* caught at sunset. Then wind and rain descended in furious volume from the southeast. The cruiser immediately headed about, following the probable course of her charge, which would be beaten far down to leeward. It was a gloomy mess on the warship. In his cabin, Captain Parkinson was frankly sea-sick: a condition which nothing but the extreme of nervous depression ever induced in him.

For several hours the rain fell and the gale howled. Then the sky swiftly cleared, and with the clearing there rose a great cry of amaze from stem to stern of the *Wolverine*. For far toward the western horizon appeared such a prodigy as the eye of no man aboard that ship had ever beheld. From a belt of marvellous, glowing gold, rich and splendid streamers of light spiralled up into the blackness of the heavens.

In all the colours of the spectrum they rose and fell; blazing orange, silken, wonderful, translucent blues, and shimmering reds. Below, a broad band of paler hue, like sheet lightning fixed to rigidity, wavered and rippled. All the auroras of the northland blended in one could but have paled away before the splendour of that terrific celestial apparition.

On board the cruiser all hands stood petrified, bound in a stricture of speechless wonder. After the first cry, silence lay leaden over the ship. It was broken by a scream of terror from forward. The quartermaster who had been at the wheel came clambering down the ladder and ran along the deck, his fingers splayed and stiffened before him in the intensity of his panic.

"The needle! The compass!" he shrieked.

Barnett ran to the wheel house with Trendon at his heels. The others followed. The needle was swaying like a cobra's head. And as a cobra's head spits venom, it spat forth a thin, steel-blue stream of lucent fire. Then so swiftly it whirled that the sparks scattered from it in a tiny shower. It stopped, quivered, and curved itself upward until it rattled like a fairy drum upon the glass shield. Barnett looked at Trendon.

"Volcanic?" he said.

"'Mine eyes have seen the coming of the glory of the Lord,'" muttered the surgeon in his deep bass, as he looked forth upon the streaming, radiant heavens. "It's like nothing else."

In the west the splendour and the terror shot to the zenith. Barnett whirled the wheel. The ship responded perfectly.

"I though she might be bewitched, too," he murmured.

"You may head her for the light, Mr. Barnett," said Captain Parkinson calmly. He had come from his cabin, all his nervous depression gone in the face of an imminent and visible danger.

Slowly the great mass of steel swung to the unknown. For an hour the unknown guided her. Then fell blackness, sudden, complete. After that radiance the dazzled eye could make out no stars, but the look-out's keen vision discerned something else.

"Ship afire," he shouted hoarsely.

"Where away?"

"Two points to leeward, near where the light was, sir."

They turned their eyes to the direction indicated, and beheld a majestic rolling volume of purple light. Suddenly a fiercer red shot it through.

"That's no ship afire," said Trendon. "Volcano in eruption."

"And the other?" asked the captain.

"No volcano, sir."

"Poor Billy Edwards wins his bet," said Forsythe, in a low voice.

"God grant he's on earth to collect it," replied Barnett solemnly.

No one turned in that night. When the sun of June 8th rose, it showed an ocean bare of prospect except that on the far horizon where the chart showed no land there rose a smudge of dirty rolling smoke. Of the schooner there was neither sign nor trace.

VI

THE CASTAWAYS

"THIS ship," growled Carter, the second officer, to Dr. Trendon, as they stood watching the growing smoke-column, "is a worse hot-bed of rumours than a down-east village. That's the third sea-gull we've had officially reported since breakfast."

As he said, three distinct times the *Wolverine* had thrilled to an imminent discovery, which, upon nearer investigation, had dwindled to nothing more than a floating fowl. Upon the heels of Carter's complaint came another hail.

"Boat ahoy. Three points on the starboard bow."

"If that's another gull," muttered Carter, "I'll have something to say to you, my festive lookout."

The news ran electrically through the cruiser, and all eyes were strained for a glimpse of the boat. The ship swung away to starboard.

"Let me know as soon as you can make her out," ordered Carter.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"There's certainly something there," said Forsythe, presently. "I can make out a speck rising on the waves."

"Bit o' wreckage from Barnett's derelict," muttered Trendon, scowling through his glasses.

"Rides too high for a spar or anything of that sort," said the junior lieutenant.

"She's a small boat," came in the clear tones of the lookout, "driftin' down."

"Anyone in her?" asked Carter.

"Can't make out yet, sir. No one's in charge though, sir."

Captain Parkinson appeared and Carter pointed out the speck to him.

"Yes. Give her full speed," said the captain, replying to a question from the officer of the deck.

Forward leapt the swift cruiser, all too slow for the anxious hearts of those aboard. For there was not one of the *Wolverines* who did not expect from this aimless traveller of desert seas at the least a leading clue to the riddle that oppressed them.

"Aloft there!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Can you make out her build?"

"Rides high, like a dory, sir."

"Wasn't there a dory on the *Laughing Lass*?" cried Forsythe.

"On her stern davits," answered Trendon.

"It is hardly probable that unattached small boats should be drifting about these seas," said Captain Parkinson, thoughtfully. "If she's a dory, she's the *Laughing Lass's* boat."

"That's what she is," said Barnett. "You can see her build plain enough now."

"Mr. Barnett, will you go aloft and keep me posted?" said the captain.

The executive officer climbed to join the lookout.

As he ascended, those below saw the little craft rise high and slow on a broad swell.

"Same dory," said Trendon. "I'd swear to her in Constantinople."

"What else could she be?" muttered Forsythe.

"Somethin' that looks like a man in the bottom of her," sang out the crow's-nest. "Two of 'em, I think."

For five minutes there was stillness aboard, broken only by an occasional low-voiced conjecture. Then from aloft:

"Two men rolling in the bottom."

"Are they alive?"

"No, sir; not that I can see."

The wind, which had been extremely variable since dawn, now whipped around a couple of points, swinging the boat's stern to them. Barnet, putting aside his glass for a moment, called down:

"That's the one, sir. I can make out the name."

"Good," said the captain quietly. "We should have news, at least."

"Ives or McGuire," suggested Forsythe, in low tones.

"Or Billy Edwards," amended Carter.

"Not Edwards," said Trendon.

"How do you know?" demanded Forsythe.

"Dory was aboard when we found her the second time, after Edwards had left."

"Can you make out which of the men are in her?" hailed the captain.

"Don't think it's any of our people," came the astonishing reply from Barnett.

"Are you sure?"

"I can see only one man's face, sir. It isn't Ives or McGuire. He's a stranger to me."

"It must be one of the crew, then."

"No, sir, beg your parding," called the lookout. "Nothin' like that in our crew, sir."

The boat came down upon them swiftly. Soon the quarter-deck was looking into her. She was of a type common enough on the high seas, except that a step for a mast showed that she had presumably been used for skimming about open shores. Of her passengers, one lay forward, prone and quiet. A length of sail cloth spread over him made it impossible to see his garb. At his breast an ugly protuberance, outlined vaguely, hinted a deformity.

The other sprawled aft, and at a nearer sight of him some of the men broke out into nervous titters. There was some excuse, for surely such a scarecrow had never before been the sport of wind and wave. A thing of shreds he was, elaborately ragged, a face overrun with a scrub of beard, and preternaturally drawn, surmounted by a stiff-dried, dirty, cloth semi-turban, with a wide, forbidding stain along the side, worked out the likeness to a make-up.

"My God!" cackled Forsythe with an hysterical explosion; and again, "My God!"

A long-drawn, irrepressible aspiration of expectancy rose from the warship's decks as the stranger raised his haggard face, turned eyes unseeingly upon them, and fell back. The forward occupant stirred not, save as the boat rolled.

From between decks someone called out, sharply, an order. In the grim silence it seemed strangely incon-

gruous that the measured business of a ship's life should be going forward as usual. Something within the newcomer's consciousness stirred to that voice of authority. Mechanically, like some huge, hideous toy, he raised first one arm, then the other, and hitched himself halfway up on the stern seat. His mouth opened. His face wrinkled. He seemed groping for the meaning of a joke at which he knew he ought to laugh. Suddenly from his lips in surprising volume, raucous, rasping, yet with a certain rollicking devilry fit to set the head a-tilt, burst a chanty:

"Oh, their coffin was their ship, and their grave it was the sea:

Blow high, blow low, what care we!

And the quarter that we gave them was to sink them in the sea:

Down on the coast of the high Barbaree-ee."

Long-drawn, like the mockery of a wail, the minor cadence wavered through the stillness, and died away.

"The High Barbaree!" cried Trendon.

"You know it?" asked the captain, expectant of a clue.

"One of those cursed tunes you can't forget," said the surgeon. "Heard a scoundrel of a beach-comber sing it years ago. Down in New Zealand, that was. When the fever rose on him he'd pipe up. Used to beat time with a steel hook he wore in place of a hand. The thing haunted me till I was sorry I hadn't let the rascal die. This creature might have learned it from him. Howls it out exactly like."

"I don't see that that helps us any," said Forsythe, looking down on the preparations that were making to receive the unexpected guests.

With a deftness which had made the *Wolverine* famous in the navy for the niceties of seamanship, the great cruiser let down her tackle as she drew skilfully alongside, and made fast, preparatory to lifting the dory gently to her broad deck. But before the order came to hoist away, one of the jackies who had gone down drew the covering back from the still figure forward, and turned it over. With a half-stifled cry he shrank back. And at that the tension of soul and mind on the *Wolverine* snapped, breaking into outcries and sudden, sharp imprecations. The face revealed was that of Timmins, the bo's'n's mate, who had sailed with the first vanished crew. A life preserver was fastened under his arms. He was dead.

"I'm out," said the surgeon briefly, and stood with mouth agape. Never had the disciplined *Wolverines* performed a sea duty with so ragged a routine as the getting in of the boat containing the live man and the dead body. The dead seaman was reverently disposed and covered. As to the survivor there was some hesitancy on the part of the captain, who was inclined to send him forward until Dr. Trendon, after a swift scrutiny, suggested that for the present, at least, he be berthed aft. They took the stranger to Edwards's vacant room, where Trendon was closeted with him for half an hour. When he emerged he was beset with questions.

"Can't give any account of himself yet," said the surgeon. "Weak and not rightly conscious."

"What ails him?"

"Enough. Gash in his scalp. Fever. Thirst and exhaustion. Nervous shock, too, I think."

"How came he aboard the *Laughing Lass*?"

"Does he know anything of Billy?" "Was he a stow-away?" "Did you ask him about Ives and McGuire?" "How came he in the small boat?"

"Where are the rest?"

"Now, now," said the veteran chidingly. "How can I tell? Would you have me kill the man with questions?"

He left them to look at the body of the bo's'n's mate. Not a word had he to say when he returned. Only the captain got anything out of him but growling and unintelligible expressions, which seemed to be objurgatory and to express bewildered cogitation.

"How long had poor Timmins been drowned?" the captain had asked him, and Trendon replied:

"Captain Parkinson, the man wasn't drowned. No water in his lungs."

"Not drowned! Then how came he by his death?"

"If I were to diagnose it under any other conditions I should say that he had inhaled flames."

Then the two men stared at each other in blank impotency. Meantime the scarecrow was showing signs of returning consciousness and a message was dispatched for the physician. On his way he met Barnett, who asked and received permission to accompany him. The stranger was tossing restlessly in his bunk, opening and shutting his parched mouth in silent, piteous appeal for the water that must still be doled to him parsimoniously.

"I think I'll try him with a little brandy," said Trendon, and sent for the liquor.

Barnett raised the patient while the surgeon held the glass to his lips. The man's hand rose, wavered, and clasped the glass.

"All right, my friend. Take it yourself, if you like," said Trendon.

The fingers closed. Tremulously held, the little glass tilted and rattled against the teeth. There was one deep, eager spasm of swallowing. Then the fevered eyes opened upon the face of the *Wolverine's* first officer.

"Prosit, Barnett," said the man, in a voice like the rasp of rusty metal.

The navy man straightened up as from a blow under the jaw.

"Be careful what you are about," warned Trendon, addressing his superior officer sharply, for Barnett had all but let his charge drop. His face was a puckered mask of amaze and incredulity.

"Did you hear him speak my name—or am I dreaming?" he half whispered.

"Heard him plain enough. Who is he?"

The man's eyes closed, but he smiled a little—a singular, wry-mouthed, winning smile. With that there sprung from behind the brush of beard, filling out the deep lines of emaciation, a memory to the recognition of Barnett; a keen and gay countenance that whisked him back across seven years time to the days of Dewey and the Philippines.

"Ralph Slade, by the Lord!" he exclaimed.

"Of the *Laughing Lass*?" cried Trendon.

"Of the *Laughing Lass*."

Such a fury of eagerness burned in the face of Barnett that Trendon cautioned him. "See here, Mr. Barnett, you're not going to fire a broadside of disturbing questions at my patient yet a while. He's in no condition."

But it was from the other that the questions came. Opening his eyes he whispered, "The sailor? Where?"

"Dead," said Trendon bluntly. Then, breaking his own rule of repression, he asked:

"Did he come off the schooner with you?"

"Picked him up," was the straining answer. "Drifting."

The survivor looked around him, then into Barnett's face, and his mind too, traversed the years.

"*North Dakota*?" he queried.

"No; I've changed my ship," said Barnett. "This is the *Wolverine*."

"Where's the *Laughing Lass*?"

Barnett shook his head.

"Tell me," begged Slade.

"Wait till you're stronger," admonished Trendon.

"Can't wait," said the weak voice. The eyes grew wild.

"Mr. Barnett, tell him the bare outline and make it short," said the surgeon.

"We sighted the *Laughing Lass* two days ago. She was in good shape, but deserted. That is, we thought she was deserted."

The man nodded eagerly.

"I suppose you were aboard," said Barnett, and

Trendon made a quick gesture of impatience and rebuke.

"No," said Slade. "Left three—four—don't know how many nights ago."

The officers looked at each other. "Go on," said Trendon to his companion.

"We put a crew aboard in command of an ensign," continued Barnett, "and picked up the schooner the next night, deserted. You must know about it. Where is Billy Edwards?"

"Never heard of him," whispered the other.

"Ives and McGuire, then. They were there after—— Great God, man!" he cried, his agitation breaking out, "Pull yourself together! Give us something to go on."

"Mr. Barnett!" said the surgeon peremptorily.

But the suggestion was working in the sick man's brain. He turned to the officers a face of horror.

"Your man, Edwards—the crew—they left her? In the night?"

"What does he mean?" cried Barnett.

"The light! You saw it?"

"Yes; we saw a strange light," answered Trendon soothingly. Slade half rose. "Lost; all lost!" he cried, and fell back unconscious. Trendon exploded into curses. "See what you've done to my patient," he fumed. Barnett looked at him with contrite eyes.

"Better get out before he comes to," growled the surgeon. "Nice way to treat a man half dead of exhaustion."

It was nearly an hour before Slade came back to the world again. The doctor forbade him to attempt

speech. But of one thing he would not be denied. There was a struggle for utterance, then:

"The volcano?" he rasped out.

"Dead ahead," was the reply.

"Stand by!" grasped Slade. He strove to rise, to say something further, but endurance had reached its limit. The man was utterly done.

Dr. Trendon went on deck, his head sunk between his shoulders. For a minute he was in earnest talk with the captain. Presently the *Wolverine's* engines slowed down, and she lay head to the waves, with just enough turn of the screw to hold her against the sea-way.

VII

THE FREE LANCE

By the following afternoon Dr. Trendon reported his patient as quite recovered.

"Starved for water," proffered the surgeon. "Tissues fairly dried out. Soaked him up. Fed him broth. Put him to sleep. He's all right. Just wakes up to eat; then off again like a two-year old. Wonderful constitution."

"The gentleman wants to know if he can come on deck, sir," saluted an orderly.

"Waked up, eh. Come on, Barnett. Help me boost him on deck."

The two officers disappeared to return in a moment arm-in-arm with Ralph Slade.

Nearly twenty-four hours' rest and skilful treatment had done wonders. He was still a trifle weak and uncertain, was still a little glad to lean on the arms of his companions, but his eye was bright and alert, and his hollow cheeks mounted a slight colour. This, with the clothes lent him by Barnett, transformed his appearance, and led Captain Parkinson to congratulate himself that he had not obeyed his first impulse to send the castaway forward with the men.

The officers pressed forward.

"Mighty glad to see you out." "Hope you've got

your pins under you again." "Old man, I'm mighty glad we came along."

The chorus of greeting was hearty enough, but the journalist barely paid the courtesy of acknowledgment. His eye swept the horizon eagerly until it rested on the cloud of volcanic smoke billowing up across the setting sun. A sigh of relief escaped him.

"Where are we?" he asked Barnett. "I mean since you picked me up. How long ago was that, anyway?"

"Yesterday," replied the navigating officer. "We've stood off and on, looking for some of our men."

"Then that's the same volcano——"

Barnett laughed softly. "Well, they aren't quite holding a caucus of volcanoes down in this country. One like that is enough."

But Slade brushed the remark aside.

"Head for it!" he cried excitedly. "We may be in time! There's a man on that island."

"A man!" "Another!" "Not Billy Edwards?" "Not some of our boys?"

Slade stared at them bewildered.

"Hold on," interposed Dr. Trendon authoritatively. "What's his name?" he inquired of the journalist.

"Darrow," replied the latter. "Percy Darrow. Do you know him?"

"Who in Kamschatka is Percy Darrow?" demanded Forsythe.

"Why, he's the assistant. "It's a long story——"

"Of course, it's a long story. There's a lot we want to know," interrupted Captain Parkinson. "Quarter-master, head for the volcano yonder. Mr. Slade, we

want to know where you came from; and why you left the schooner, and who Percy Darrow is. And there's dinner, so we'll just adjourn to the messroom and hear what you can tell us. But there's one thing we're all anxious to know; how came you in the dory which we found and left on the *Laughing Lass* no later than two days ago?"

"I haven't set eyes on the *Laughing Lass* for—well, I don't know how long, but it's five days anyway, perhaps more," replied Slade.

They stared at him incredulously.

"Oh, I see!" he burst out suddenly; "there were twin dories on the schooner. The other one's still there, I suppose. Did you find her on the stern davits?"

"Yes."

"That's it, then. You see when I left——"

Captain Parkinson's raised hand checked him. "If you will be so good, Mr. Slade, let us have it all at once, after mess."

At table the young officers, at a sharp hint from Dr. Trendon, conversed on indifferent subjects until the journalist had partaken heartily of what the physician allowed him. Slade ate with keen appreciation.

"I tell you, that's good," he sighed, when he had finished. "Real, live, after-dinner coffee, too. Why, gentlemen, I haven't eaten a civilised meal, with all the trimmings, for over two years. Doctor, do you think a little of the real stuff would hurt me? It's a pretty dry yarn."

"One glass," growled the surgeon, "no more."

"Scotch high-ball, then," voted Slade, "the higher the better."

The steward brought a tall glass with ice, in which the newcomer mixed his drink. Then for quite a minute he sat silent, staring at the table, his fingers aimlessly rubbing into spots of wetness the water beads as they gathered on the outside of his glass. Suddenly he looked up.

"I don't know how to begin," he confessed. "It's too confounded improbable. I hardly believe it myself, now that I'm sitting here in human clothes, surrounded by human beings. Old Scrubs, and the Nigger, and Handy Solomon, and the Professor, and the chest, and the—well, they were real enough when I was caught in the mess. But I warn you, you are not going to believe me, and hanged if I blame you a bit."

"We've seen marvels ourselves in the last few days," encouraged Captain Parkinson.

"Fire ahead, man," advised Barnett impatiently. "Just begin at the beginning and let it go at that."

Slade sipped at his glass reflectively.

"Well," said he at length, "the best way to begin is to show you how I happened to be mixed up in it at all."

The officers unconsciously relaxed into attitudes of greater ease. Overhead the lamps swayed gently to the swell. The dull throb of the screw pulsed. Stewards clad in white moved noiselessly, filling the glasses, deferentially striking lights for the smokers, clearing away the last dishes of the repast.

"I'm a reporter by choice, and a detective by in-

stinct," began Slade, with startling abruptness. "Furthermore, I'm pretty well off. I'm what they call a free lance, for I have no regular desk on any of the journals. I generally turn my stuff in to the *Star* because they treat me well. In return it is pretty well understood between us that I'm to use my judgment in regard to 'stories' and that they'll stand back of me for expenses. You see, I've been with them quite a while."

He looked around the circle as though in appeal to the comprehension of his audience. Some of the men nodded. Others sipped from their glasses or drew at their cigars.

"I loaf around here and there in the world, having a good time travelling, visiting, fooling around. Every once in a while something interests me. The thing is a sort of instinct. I run it down. If it's a good story, I send it in. That's all there is to it." He laughed slightly. "You see, I'm a sort of magazine writer in method, but my stuff is newspaper stuff. Also the game suits me. That's why I play it. That's why I'm here. I have to tell you about myself this way so you will understand how I came to be mixed up in this *Laughing Lass* matter."

"I remember," commented Barnett, "that when you came aboard the *South Dakota*, you had a little trouble making Captain Arnold see it." He turned to the others with a laugh. "He had all kinds of papers of ancient date, but nothing modern—letter from the *Star* dated five years back, recommendations to everybody on earth, except Captain Arnold, certificate of bravery in Apache campaign, bank identifications, and all the

rest. 'Maybe you're the *Star's* correspondent, and maybe you're not,' said the Captain, 'I don't see anything here to prove it.' Slade argued an hour; no go. Remember how you caught him?" he inquired of Slade.

The reporter grinned assent.

"After the old man had turned him down for good, Slade fished down in his warbag and hauled out an old tattered document from an oilskin case. 'Hold on a minute,' said he, 'you old shellback. I've proved to you that I can write; and I've proved to you that I have fought, and now here I'll prove to you that I can sail. If writing, fighting, and sailing don't fit me adequately to report any little disturbances your antiquated washboiler may blunder into, I'll go to raising cabbages.' With that he presented a master's certificate! Where did you get it, anyway? I never found out."

"Passed as 'fresh-water' on the Great Lakes," replied Slade briefly.

"Well, the spunk and the certificate finished the captain. He was an old square rigger himself in the Civil War."

"So much for myself," Slade continued. "As for the *Laughing Lass*——"

PART TWO

THE BRASS BOUND CHEST

*Being the story told by Ralph Slade, Free Lance, to
the officers of the United States cruiser Wol-
verine.*

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I

THE BARBARY COAST

A COINCIDENCE got me aboard her. I'll tell you how it was. One evening late I was just coming out of a dark alley on the Barbary Coast, San Francisco. You know—the water front, where you can hear more tongues than at Port Said, see stranger sights, and meet adventure with the joyous certainty of mediæval times. I'd been down there hunting up a man reported, by a wharf-rat of my acquaintance, to have just returned from a two years' whaling voyage. He'd been "shanghaied" aboard, and as a matter of fact, was worth nearly a million dollars. Landed in the city without a cent, could get nobody to believe him, nor trust him to the extent of a telegram East. Wharf-rat laughed at his yarn; but I believe it was true. Good copy anyway——

Just at the turn of the alley I nearly bumped into two men. On the Barbary Coast you don't pass men in narrow places until you have reconnoitered a little. I pulled up, thanking fortune that they had not seen me. The first words were uttered in a voice I knew well.

You've all heard of Dr. Karl Augustus Schermerhorn. He did some big things, and had in mind still bigger. I'd met him some time before in connection with his telepathy and wireless waves theory.

It was picturesque stuff for my purpose, but wasn't in it with what the old fellow had really done. He showed me—well, that doesn't matter. The point is, that good, staid, self-centred, or rather science-centred, Dr. Schermerhorn was standing at midnight in a dark alley on the Barbary Coast in San Francisco talking to an individual whose facial outline at least was not ornamental.

My curiosity, or professional instinct, whichever you please, was all aroused. I flattened myself against the wall.

The first remark I lost. The reply came to me in a shrill falsetto. So grotesque was the effect of this treble from a bulk so squat and broad and hairy as the silhouette before me that I almost laughed aloud.

"I guess you've made no mistake on that. I'm her master, and her owner too."

"Well, I haf been told you might rent her," said the Doctor.

"Rent her!" mimicked the falsetto. "Well, that—hell, yes, I'll *rent* her!" he laughed again.

"Doch recht." The Doctor was plainly at the end of his practical resources.

After waiting a moment for something more definite, the falsetto inquired rather drily:

"How long? What to? What for? Who are you, anyway?"

"I am Dr. Schermerhorn," the latter answered.

"Seen pieces about you in the papers."

"How many men haf you in the crew?"

"Me and the mate and the cook and four hands."

"And you could go—soon?"

"Soon as you want—if I go."

"I wish to leaf to-morrow."

"If I can get the crew together, I might make it. But say, let's not hang out here in this run of darkness. Come over to the grog shop yonder where we can sit down."

To my relief, for my curiosity was fully aroused—Dr. Schermerhorn's movements are usually productive—this proposal was vetoed.

"No, no!" cried the Doctor, with some haste, "this iss well! Somebody might oferhear."

The huge figure stirred into an attitude of close attention. After a pause the falsetto asked deliberately:

"Where we goin'?"

"I brefer not to say."

"H'm! How long a cruise?"

"I want to rent your schooner and your crew as long-as I-please-to remain."

"H'm! How long's that likely to be?"

"Maybe a few months; maybe seferal years."

"H'm! Unknown port; unknown cruise. See here, anything crooked in this?"

"No, no! Not at all! It iss simply business of my own."

"Not that I care," commented the other easily, "only risks is worth paying for."

"There shall not be risk."

"Pearls likely?" hazarded the other, without much heed to the assurance. "Them Jap gunboats is getting pretty hard to dodge of late years. However, I've dodged 'em before."

"Now as to pay—how mooch iss your boat worth?"

I could almost follow the man's thoughts as he pondered how much he dared ask.

"Well, you see, for a proposition like that—don't know where we're going, when we're going to get back,—and them gunboats—how would a hundred and twenty-five a month strike you?"

"Double it up. I want you to do ass I say, and I will also give your crew double wages. Bud I want goot men, who will stay, and who will keep the mouth shut."

"Gosh all fish-hooks! They'd go to hell with you for that!"

"Now you can get all you want of Adams & Marsh. Tell them it iss for me. Brovisions for three years, anyhow. Be ready to sail to-morrow."

"Tide turns at eight in the evening."

"I will send some effects in the morning."

The master hesitated.

"That's all right, Doctor, but how do I know it's all right? Maybe by morning you'll change your mind."

"That cannot be. My plans are all——"

"It's the usual thing to pay something——"

"Ach, but yes. I haf forgot. Darrow told me. I will make you a check. Let us go to the table of which you spoke."

They moved away, still talking. I did not dare follow them into the light, for I feared that the Doctor would recognise me. I'd have given my eye teeth, though, to have gathered the name of the



“Where we goin’?” “I brefer not to say”

schooner, or that of her master. As it was, I hung around until the two had emerged from the corner saloon. They paused outside, still talking earnestly. I ventured a hasty interview with the bar-keeper.

"Did you notice the two men who were sitting at the middle table?" I asked him.

"Sure!" said he, shoving me my glass of beer.

"Know them?" I inquired.

"Never laid eyes on 'em before. Old chap looked like a sort of corn doctor or corner spell-binder. Other was probably one of these longshore abalone men."

"Thanks," I muttered, and dodged out again, leaving the beer untouched.

I cursed myself for a blunderer. When I got to the street the two men had disappeared. I should have shadowed the captain to his vessel.

The affair interested me greatly. Apparently Dr. Schermerhorn was about to go on a long voyage. I prided myself on being fairly up to date in regard to the plans of those who interested the public; and the public at that time was vastly interested in Dr. Schermerhorn. I, in common with the rest of the world, had imagined him anchored safely in Philadelphia, immersed in chemical research. Here he bobbed up at the other end of the continent, making shady bargains with obscure shipping captains, and paying a big premium for absolute secrecy. It looked good.

Accordingly I was out early the next morning. I had not much to go by; schooners are as plenty as tadpoles in San Francisco harbour. However, I was sure I could easily recognise that falsetto voice; and

I knew where the supplies were to be purchased. Adams & Marsh are a large firm, and cautious. I knew better than to make direct inquiries, or to appear in the salesroom. But by hanging around the door of the shipping room I soon had track of the large orders to be sent that day. In this manner I had no great difficulty in following a truck to Pier 10, nor to identify a consignment to Captain Ezra Selover as probably that of which I was in search.

The mate was in charge of the stowage, so I could not be quite sure. Here, however, was a schooner—of about a hundred and fifty tons burden. I looked her over.

You're all acquainted with the *Laughing Lass* and the perfection of her lines. You have not known her under Captain Ezra Selover. She was the cleanest ship I ever saw. Don't know how he accomplished it, with a crew of four and the cook; but he did. The deck looked as though it had been holystoned every morning by a crew of jackies; the stays were whipped and tarred, the mast new-slushed, and every foot of running gear coiled down shipshape and Bristol fashion. There was a good deal of brass about her; it shone like gold, and I don't believe she owned an inch of paint that wasn't either fresh or new-scrubbed.

I gazed for some time at this marvel. It's unusual enough anywhere, but aboard a California hooker it is little short of miraculous. The crew had all turned up, apparently, and a swarm of stevedores were hustling every sort of provisions, supplies, stock, spars, lines and canvas down into the hold. It was a rush job, and that mate was having his hands full. I didn't

wonder at his language nor at his looks, both of which were somewhat mussed up. Then almost at my elbow I heard that shrill falsetto squeal, and turned just in time to see the captain ascend the after gangplank.

He was probably the most dishevelled and untidy man I ever laid my eyes on. His hair and beard were not only long, but tangled and unkempt, and grew so far toward each other as barely to expose a strip of dirty brown skin. His shoulders were bowed and enormous. His arms hung like a gorilla's, palms turned slightly outwards. On his head was jammed a linen boating hat that had once been white; gaping away from his hairy chest was a faded dingy checked cotton shirt that had once been brown and white; his blue trousers were spotted and splashed with dusty stains; he was chewing tobacco. A figure more in contrast to the exquisitely neat vessel it would be hard to imagine.

The captain mounted the gangplank with a steadiness that disproved my first suspicion of his having been on a drunk. He glanced aloft, cast a speculative eye on the stevedores trooping across the waist of the ship, and ascended to the quarter-deck where the mate stood leaning over the rail and uttering directed curses from between sweat-beaded lips. There the big man roamed aimlessly on what seemed to be a tour of casual inspection. Once he stopped to breathe on the brass binnacle and to rub it bright with the dirtiest red bandana handkerchief I ever want to see.

His actions amused me. The discrepancy between his personal habits and his particularity in the matter of his surroundings was exceedingly interesting. I

have often noticed that such discrepancies seem to indicate exceptional characters. As I watched him, his whole frame stiffened. The long gorilla arms contracted, the hairy head sunk forward in the tenseness of a serpent ready to strike. He uttered a shrill falsetto shriek that brought to a standstill every stevedore on the job, and sprang forward to seize his mate by the shoulder.

Evidently the grasp hurt. I can believe it might, from those huge hands. The man wrenched himself about with an oath of inquiry and pain. I could hear one side of what followed. The captain's high-pitched tones carried clearly; but the grumble and growl of the mate were indistinguishable at that distance.

"How far is it to the side of the ship, you hound of hell?" shrieked the captain.

Mumble—surprised—for an answer.

"Well, I'll tell you, you *swab*! It's just two fathom from where you stand. Just two fathom! How long would it take you to walk there? How long? Just about six seconds! There and back! You——" I won't bother with all the epithets, although by now I know Captain Selover's vocabulary fairly well. "And you couldn't take six seconds off to spit over the side! Couldn't walk two fathom! Had to spit on my quarter-deck, did you!"

Rumble from the mate.

"No, by God, you won't call up any of the crew. You'll get a swab and do it yourself. You'll get a *hand* swab and get down on your knees, damn you! I'll teach you to be lazy!"

The mate said something again.

"It don't matter if we ain't under way. That has nothing to do with it. The quarter-deck is clean, if the waist ain't, and nobody but a damn misbegotten son-of-a-sea-lawyer would spit on deck anyhow!" From this Captain Selover went on into a good old-fashioned deep-sea "cussing out," to the great joy of the stevedores.

The mate stood it pretty well, but there comes a time when further talk is useless even in regard to a most heinous offense. And, of course, as you know, the mate could hardly consider himself very seriously at fault. Why, the ship was not yet at sea, and in all the clutter of charging. He began to answer back. In a moment it was a quarrel. Abruptly it was a fight. The mate marked Selover beneath the left eye. The captain with beautiful simplicity crushed his antagonist in his gorilla-like squeeze, carried him to the side of the vessel, and dropped him limp and beaten to the pier. And the mate was a good stout specimen of a sea-farer, too.

Then the captain rushed below, emerging after an instant with a chest which he flung after his subordinate. It was followed a moment later by a stream of small stuff,—mingled with language—projected through an open port-hole. This in turn ceased. The captain reappeared with a pail and brush, scrubbed feverishly at the offending spot, mopped it dry with that same old red bandana handkerchief, glared about him,—and abruptly became as serene and placid as a noon calm. He took up the direction of the stevedores. It was all most astounding.

Nobody paid any attention to the mate. He looked toward the ship once or twice, thought better of it, and began to pick up his effects, muttering savagely. In a moment or so he threw his chest aboard an outgoing truck and departed.

It was now nearly noon and I was just in the way of going for something to eat, when I caught sight of another dray laden with boxes and crated affairs which I recognised as scientific apparatus. It was followed in quick succession by three others. Ignorant as I was of the requirements of a scientist, my common sense told me this could be no exploring outfit. I revised my first intention of going to the club, and bought a sandwich or two at the corner coffee house. I don't know why, but even then the affair seemed big with mystery, with the portent of tragedy. Perhaps the smell of tar was in my nostrils and the sea called. It has always possessed for me an extraordinary allurements—

A little after two o'clock a cab drove to the after gangplank and stopped. From it alighted a young man of whom I shall later have occasion to tell you more, followed by Dr. Schermerhorn. The young man carried only a light leather "serviette," such as students use abroad; while the doctor fairly staggered under the weight of a square, brass-bound chest without handles. The singularity of this unequal division of labour struck me at once.

It struck also one of the dock men, who ran forward, eager for a tip.

"Kin I carry th' box for you, boss?" he asked, at the same time reaching for it.

The doctor's thin figure seemed fairly to shrink at the idea.

"No, no!" he cried. "It iss not for you to carry!"

He hastened up the gangplank, clutching the chest close. At the top Captain Selover met him.

"Hello, doctor," he squeaked. "Here in good time. We're busy, you see. Let me carry your chest for you."

"No, no!" Dr. Schermerhorn fairly glared.

"It's almighty heavy," insisted the captain. "Let me give you a hand."

"You must not *touch!*" emphatically ordered the scientist. "Where iss the cabin?"

He disappeared down the companionway clasping his precious load. The young man remained on deck to superintend the stowing of the scientific goods and the personal baggage.

All this time I had been thinking busily. I remembered distinctly one other instance when Dr. Schermerhorn had disappeared. He came back inscrutably, but within a week his results on aërial photography were public property. I told myself that in the present instance his lavish use of money, the elaborate nature of his preparations, the evident secrecy of the expedition as evidenced by the fact that he had negotiated for the vessel only the day before setting sail, the importance of personal supervision as proved by the fact that he—notoriously impractical in practical matters, and notoriously disliking anything to do with business—had conducted the affair himself instead of delegating it,—why, gentlemen, don't you see that all this was more than enough to wake me up, body and

soul? Suddenly I came to a definite resolution. Captain Selover had descended to the pier. I approached him.

"You need a mate," said I.

He looked me over.

"Perhaps," he admitted. "Where's your man?"

"Right here," said I.

His eyes widened a little. Otherwise he showed no sign of surprise. I cursed my clothes.

Fortunately I had my master's certificate with me—I'd passed fresh-water on the Great Lakes—I always carry that sort of document on the chance that it may come handy. It chanced to have a couple of naval endorsements, results of the late war.

"Look here," I said before I gave it to him. "You don't believe in me. My clothes are too good. That's all right. They're all I have that are good. I'm broke. I came down here wondering whether I'd better throw myself in the drink."

"You look like a dude," he squeaked. "Where did you ever ship?"

I handed him my certificate. The endorsements from Admiral Keays and Captain Arnold impressed him. He stared at me again, and a gleam of cunning crept into his eyes.

"Nothing crooked about this?" he breathed softly.

I had the key to this side of his character. You remember I had overheard the night before his statement of his moral scruples. I said nothing, but looked knowing.

"What was it?" he murmured. "Plain desertion, or something worse?"

I remained inscrutable.

"Well," he conceded, "I do need a mate; and a naval man—even if he is wantin' to get out of sight——"

"He won't spit on your decks, anyway," I broke in boldly.

Captain Selover's hairy face bristled about the mouth. This I subsequently discovered was symptom of a grin.

"You saw that, eh?" he trebled.

"Aren't you afraid he'll bring down the police and delay your sailing?" I asked.

He grinned again, with a cunning twinkle in his eye.

"You needn't worry. There ain't goin' to be any police. He had his advance money, and he won't risk it by tryin' to come back."

We came to an agreement. I professed surprise at the wages. The captain guardedly explained that the expedition was secret.

"What's our port?" I asked, to test him.

"Our papers are made out for Honolulu," he replied.

We adjourned to sign articles.

"By the way," said I, "I wish you wouldn't make them out in my own name. 'Eagen' will do."

"All right," he laughed, "I *sabe*. Eagen it is."

"I'll be aboard at six," said I. "I've got to make some arrangements."

"Wish you could help with the lading," said he. "Still, I can get along. Want any advance money?"

"No," I replied; then I remembered that I was supposed to be broke. "Yes," I amended.

He gave me ten dollars.

"I guess you'll show up," he said. "Wouldn't do this to everybody. But a naval man—even if he is dodgin' Uncle Sam——"

"I'll be here," I assured him.

At that time I wore a pointed beard. This I shaved. Also I was accustomed to use eye-glasses. The trouble was merely a slight astigmatism which bothered me only in reading or close inspection. I could get along perfectly well without the glasses, so I discarded them. I had my hair cut rather close. When I had put on sea boots, blue trousers and shirt, a pea jacket and a cap I felt quite safe from the recognition of a man like Dr. Schermerhorn. In fact, as you shall see, I hardly spoke to him during all the voyage out.

Promptly at six, then, I returned with a sea chest, bound I knew not whither, to be gone I knew not for how long, and pledged to act as second officer on a little hundred-and-fifty-ton schooner.

II

THE GRAVEN IMAGE

I HAD every reason to be satisfied with my disguise,—if such it could be called. Captain Selover at first failed to recognise me. Then he burst into his shrill cackle.

“Didn’t know you,” he trebled. “But you look shipshape. Come, I’ll show you your quarters.”

Immediately I discovered what I had suspected before; that on so small a schooner the mate took rank with the men rather than the afterguard. Cabin accommodations were of course very limited. My own lurked in the waist of the ship—a tiny little airless hole.

“Here’s where Johnson stayed,” proffered Selover. “You can bunk here, or you can go in the foc’sle with the men. They’s more room there. We’ll get under way with the turn of the tide.”

He left me. I examined the cabin. It was just a trifle larger than its single berth, and the berth was just a trifle larger than myself. My chest would have to be left outside. I strongly suspected that my lungs would have to be left outside also; for the life of me I could not see where the air was to come from. With a mental reservation in favour of investigating the forecastle, I went on deck.

The *Laughing Lass* was one of the prettiest little schooners I ever saw. Were it not for the lines of her

bilges and the internal arrangement of her hold, it might be imagined she had been built originally as a pleasure yacht. Even the rake of her masts, a little forward of the plumb, bore out this impression, which a comparatively new suit of canvas, well stopped down, brass stanchions forward, and two little guns under tarpaulins, almost confirmed. One thing struck me as peculiar. Her complement of boats was ample enough. She had two surf boats, a dingy, and a dory slung to the davits. In addition another dory,—the one you picked me up in—was lashed to the top of the deck house.

"They'd mighty near have a boat apiece," I thought, and went forward.

Just outside the forecastle hatch I paused. Someone below was singing in a voice singularly rich in quality. The words and the quaintness of the minor air struck me immensely and have clung to my memory like a burr ever since.

" 'Are you a man-o'-war or a privateer,' said he.

Blow high, blow low, what care we!

'Oh, I am a jolly pirate, and I'm sailing for my fee.'

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e."

I stepped to the companion. The voice at once ceased. I descended.

A glimmer of late afternoon struggled through the deadlights. I found myself in a really commodious space,—extending far back of where the forward bulkheads are usually placed,—accommodating rows and row of bunks—eighteen of them, in fact. The un-

THE GRAVEN IMAGE

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lighted lamp cast its shadow on wood stained black by much use, but polished like ebony from the continued friction of men's garments. I wish I could convey to you the uncanny effect this—of stepping from the decks of a miniature craft to the internal arrangements of a square-rigged ship. It was as though entering a cottage door, you were to discover yourself on the floor of Madison Square Garden. A fresh sweet breeze of evening sucked down the hatch. I immediately decided on the foremast. Already it was being borne in on me that I was little more than a glorified bo's'n's mate. The situation suited me however. It enabled me to watch the course of events more safely, less exposed to the danger of recognition.

I stood for a moment at the foot of the companion accustoming my eyes to the gloom. After a moment, with a shock of surprise, I made out a shining pair of bead-points gazing at me unblinkingly from the shadow under the bitts. Slowly the man defined himself, as a shape takes form in a fog. He was leaning forward in an attitude of attention, his elbows resting on his knees, his forearms depending between them, his head thrust out. I could detect no faintest movement of eyelash, no faintest sound of breathing. The stillness was portentous. The creature was exactly like a wax figure, one of the sort you meet in corridors of cheap museums and for a moment mistake for living beings. Almost I thought to make out the customary grey dust lying on the wax of his features.

I am going to tell you more of this man, because, as you shall see, he was destined to have much to do with

my life, the fate of Dr. Karl Augustus Schermerhorn, and the doom of the *Laughing Lass*.

He wore on his head a red bandana handkerchief. I never saw him with other covering. From beneath it straggled oily and tangled locks of glossy black. His face was long, narrow, hook-nosed and sinister; his eyes, as I have described them, a steady and beady black. I could at first glance ascribe great activity, but only moderate strength to his slender, wiry figure. In this I was mistaken. His sheer physical power was second only to that of Captain Selover. One of his forearms ended in a steel hook. At the moment I could not understand this; could not see how a man so maimed could be useful aboard a ship. Later I wished we had more as handy. He knew a jam hitch which he caught over and under his hook quicker than most men can grasp a line with the naked hand. It would render one way, but held fast the other. He told me it was a cinch-hook hitch employed by mule packers in the mountains, and that he had used it on swamp-hooks in the lumber woods of Michigan. I shouldn't wonder. He was a Wandering Jew.—His name was Anderson, but I never heard him called that. It was always "Handy Solomon" with men and masters.

We stared at each other, I fascinated by something, some spell of the ship, which I have never been able to explain to myself—nor even describe. It was a mystery, a portent, a premonition such as overtakes a man sometimes in the dark passageways of life. I cannot tell you of it, nor make you believe—let it pass——

Then by a slow process of successive perceptions I

became aware that I was watched by other eyes, other wax figures, other human beings with unwavering gaze. They seemed to the sense of mystic apprehension that for the moment held possession of me, to be everywhere—in the bunks, on the floor, back in the shadows, watching, watching, watching from the advantage of another world.

I don't know why I tell you this; why I lay so much stress on the first weird impression I got of the fore-castle. It means something to me now—in view of all that happened subsequently. Almost can I look back and see, in that moment of occultism, a warning, an enlightenment—— But the point is, it meant something to me then. I stood there fascinated, unable to move, unable to speak.

Then the grotesque figure in the corner stirred.

"Well, mates," said the man, "believe or not believe, it's in the book, and it stands to reason, too. We have gold mines here in Californy and Nevada and all them States; and we hear of gold mines in Mexico and Australia, too, but did you ever hear tell of gold mines in Europe? Tell me that! And where did the gold come from then, before they discovered America? Tell me that! Why they *made* it, just as the man that wrote this-here says, and you can kiss the Book on that."

"How about that place, Ophir, I read about?" asked a voice from the bunks.

The man shot a keen glance thither from beneath his brows.

"Know last year's output from the mines of Ophir, Thrackles?" he inquired in silky tones.

"Why, no," stammered the man addressed as Thrackles.

"Well I do," pursued the man with the steel hook, "and it's just the whole of nothing, and you can kiss the Book on that too! There ain't any gold output, because there ain't any mines, and there never have been. They *made* their gold."

He tossed aside a book he had been holding in his left hand. I recognised the fat little paper duodecimo with amusement, and some wonder. The only other copy I had ever laid my eyes on is in the Astor Library. It is somewhat of a rarity, called *The Secret of Alchemy, or the Grand Doctrine of Transmutation Fully Explained*, and was written by a Dr. Edward Duvall,—a most extraordinary volume to have fallen into the hands of seamen.

I stepped forward, greeting and being greeted. Besides the man I have mentioned they were four. The cook was a bullet-headed squat negro with a broken nose. I believe he had a name,—Robinson, or something of that sort. He was to all of us, simply the Nigger. Unlike most of his race, he was gloomy and taciturn.

Of the other two, a little white-faced, thin-chested youth named Pulz, and a villainous-looking Mexican called Perdosa, I shall have more to say later.

My arrival broke the talk on alchemy. It resumed its course in the direction of our voyage. Each discovered that the others knew nothing; and each blundered against the astounding fact of double wages.

"All I know is the pay's good; and that's enough," concluded Thrackles, from a bunk.

"The pay's too good," growled Handy Solomon. "This ain't no job to go look at the 'clipse of the moon, or the devil's a preacher!"

"W'at you maik heem, den?" queried Perdosa.

"It's treasure, of course," said Handy Solomon shortly.

"He, he, he!" laughed the negro, without mirth.

"What's the matter with you, Doctor?" demanded Thrackles.

"Treasure!" repeated the Nigger. "You see dat box he done carry so cairful? You see dat?"

A pause ensued. Somebody scratched a match and lit a pipe.

"No, I don't see that!" broke out Thrackles finally, with some impatience. "I *sabe* how a man goes *after* treasure with a box; but why should he take treasure away *in* a box? What do you think, Bucko?" he suddenly appealed to me.

I looked up from my investigation of the empty berths.

"I don't think much about it," I replied, "except that by the look of the stores we're due for more than Honolulu; and from the look of the light we'd better turn to on deck."

An embarrassed pause fell.

"Who are you, anyway?" bluntly demanded the man with the steel hook.

"My name is Eagen," I replied; "I've the berth of mate. Which of these bunks are empty?"

They indicated what I desired with just a trace of sullenness. I understood well enough their resentment at having a ship's officer quartered on them,—the

forec'stle they considered as their only liberty when at sea, and my presence as a curtailment to the freedom of speech. I subsequently did my best to overcome this feeling, but never quite succeeded.

At my command the Nigger went to his galley. I ascended to the deck. Dusk was falling, in the swift Californian fashion. Already the outlines of the wharf houses were growing indistinct, and the lights of the city were beginning to twinkle. Captain Selover came to my side and leaned over the rail, peering critically at the black water against the piles.

"She's at the flood," he squeaked. "And here comes the *Lucy Belle*."

The tug took us in charge and puffed with us down the harbour and through the Golden Gate. We had sweated the canvas on her, even to the flying jib and a huge club topsail she sometimes carried at the main, for the afternoon trades had lost their strength. About midnight we drew up on the Farallones.

The schooner handled well. Our crew was divided into three watches—an unusual arrangement, but comfortable. Two men could sail her handily in most sorts of weather. Handy Solomon had the wheel. Otherwise the deck was empty. The man's fantastic headgear, the fringe of his curling oily locks, the hawk outline of his face momentarily silhouetted against the phosphorescence astern as he glanced to windward, all lent him an appearance of another day. I could almost imagine I caught the gleam of silver-butted horse pistols and cutlasses at his waist.

I brooded in wonder at what I had seen and how little I had explained. The number of boats, sufficient

for a craft of three times the tonnage; the capacity of the forec'stle with its eighteen bunks, enough for a passenger ship,—what did it mean? And this wild, unkempt, villainous crew with its master and his almost ridiculous contrast of neatness and filth;—did Dr. Schermerhorn realise to what he had trusted himself and his precious expedition, whatever it might be?

The lights of shore had sunk; the *Laughing Lass* staggered and leaped joyously with the glory of the open sea. She seemed alone on the bosom of the ocean; and for the life of me I could not but feel that I was embarked on some desperate adventure. The notion was utterly illogical; that I knew well. In sober thought, I, a reporter, was shadowing a respectable and venerable scientist, who in turn was probably about to investigate at length some little-known deep-sea conditions or phenomena of an unexplored island. But that did not suffice to my imagination. The ship, its surroundings, its equipment, its crew—all read fantastic. So much the better story, I thought, shrugging my shoulders at last.

III

THE TWELVE REPEATING RIFLES

AFTER my watch below the next morning I met Percy Darrow. In many ways he is, or was, the most extraordinary of my many acquaintances. During that first half hour's chat with him I changed my mind at least a dozen times. One moment I thought him clever, the next an utter ass; now I found him frank, open, a good companion, eager to please,—and then a droop of his blond eyelashes, a lazy, impertinent drawl of his voice, a hint of half-bored condescension in his manner, convinced me that he was shy and affected. In a breath I appraised him as intellectual, a fool, a shallow mind, a deep schemer, an idler, and an enthusiast. One result of his spasmodic confidences was to throw a doubt upon their accuracy. This might be what he desired; or with equal probability it might be the chance reflection of a childish and aimless amiability.

He was tall and slender and pale, languid of movement, languid of eye, languid of speech. His eyes drooped, half-closed beneath blond brows; a long wiry hand lazily twisted a rather affected blond moustache, his voice drawled his speech in a manner either insufferably condescending and impertinent, or inefably tired,—who could tell which?

I found him leaning against the taffrail, his languid graceful figure supported by his elbows, his chin

propped against his hand. As I approached the binnacle, he raised his eyes and motioned me to him. The insolence of it was so superb that for a moment I was angry enough to ignore him. Then I reflected that I was here, not to stand on my personal dignity, but to get information. I joined him.

"You are the mate?" he drawled.

"Since I am on the quarter-deck," I snapped back at him.

He eyed me thoughtfully, while he rolled with one hand a corn-husk Mexican cigarette.

"Do you know where you are going?" he inquired at length.

"Depends on the moral character of my future actions," I rejoined tartly.

He allowed a smile to break and fade, then lighted his cigarette.

"The first mate seems to have a remarkable command of language," said he.

I did not reply.

"Well, to tell you the truth *I* don't know where we are going," he continued. "Thought you might be able to inform me. Where did this ship and its precious gang of cutthroats come from, anyway?"

"Meaning me?"

"Oh, meaning you too, for all I know," he shrugged wearily. Suddenly he turned to me and laid his hand on my shoulder with one of those sudden bursts of confidence I came later to recognise and look for, but in which I could never quite believe—nor disbelieve.

"I am eaten with curiosity," he stated in the least

curious voice in the world. "I suppose you know who his Nibs is?"

"Dr. Schermerhorn, do you mean?"

"Yes. Well, I've been with him ten years. I am his right-hand man. All his business I transact down to the last penny. I even order his meals. His discoveries have taken shape in my hands. Suddenly he gets a freak. He will go on a voyage. Where? I shall know in good time. For how long? I shall know in good time. For what purpose? Same answer. What accommodations shall I engage? I experience the worst shock of my life;—he will engage them himself. What scientific apparatus? Shock number two;—he will attend to that. Is there anything I can do? What do you suppose he says?"

"How should I know?" I asked.

"You should know in the course of intelligent conversation with me," he drawled. "Well, he, good old staid Schermie with the vertebrated thoughts gets kittenish. He says to me, 'Joost imachin, Percy, you are all-alone-on-a-desert-island placed; and that you will sit on those sands and wish within yourself all you would buy to be comfortable. Go out and buy me those things—in abundance.' Those were my directions."

He puffed.

"What does he pay you?" he asked.

"Enough," I replied.

"More than enough, by a good deal, I'll bet," he rejoined. "The old fool! He ought to have left it to me. What is this craft? Have you ever sailed on her before?"

"No."

"Have any of the crew?"

I replied that I believed all of them were Selover's men. He threw the cigarette butt into the sea and turned back.

"Well, I wish you joy of your double wages," he mocked.

So he knew that, after all! How much more of his ignorance was pretended I had no means of guessing. His eye gleamed sarcastically as he sauntered toward the companion-way. Handy Solomon was at the wheel, steering easily with one foot and an elbow. His steel hook lay fully exposed, glittering in the sunlight. Darrow glanced at it curiously, and at the man's headgear.

"Well, my genial pirate," he drawled, "if you had a line to fit that hook, you'd be equipped for fishing." The man's teeth bared like an animal's, but Darrow went on easily as though unconscious of giving offence. "If I were you, I'd have it arranged so the hook would turn backward as well as forward. It would be handier for some things,—fighting, for instance."

He passed on down the companion. Handy Solomon glared after him, then down at his hook. He bent his arm this way and that, drawing the hook toward him softly, as a cat does her claws. His eyes cleared and a look of admiration crept into them.

"By God, he's right!" he muttered, and after a moment; "I've wore that ten year and never thought of it. The little son of a gun!"

He remained staring for a moment at the hook.

Then he looked up and caught my eye. His own turned quizzical. He shifted his quid and began to hum:

“The bos’n laid aloft, aloft laid he,
 Blow high, blow low! What care we?
‘There’s a ship upon the wind’ard, a wreck upon the
 lee,’
 Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e.”

We had entered the trades and were making good time. I was content to stay on deck, even in my watch below. The wind was strong, the waves dashing, the sky very blue. From under our forefoot the flying fish sped, the monsters pursued them. A tingle of spray was in the air. It was all very pleasant. The red handkerchief around Solomon’s head made a pretty spot of colour against the blue of the sky and the darker blue of the sea. Silhouetted over the flawless white of the deck house was the sullen, polished profile of the Nigger. Beneath me the ship swerved and leaped, yielded and recovered. I breathed deep, and saw cutlasses in harmless shadows. It was two years ago. I was young—then——

At the mess hour I stood in doubt. However, I was informed by the captain’s falsetto that I was to eat in the cabin. As the only other officer, I ate alone, after the others had finished, helping myself from the dishes left on the table. It was a handsome cabin, well kept, with white woodwork spotlessly clean, leather cushions—much better than one would expect. I afterwards found that the neatness of this cabin and

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of the three staterooms was maintained by the Nigger—at peril of his neck. A rack held a dozen rifles, five revolvers, and,—at last—my cutlasses. I examined the lot with interest. They were modern weapons,—the new high power 30-40 box-magazine rifle, shooting government ammunition,—and had been used. The revolvers were of course the old 45 Colt's. This was an extraordinary armament for a peaceable schooner of one hundred and fifty tons burden.

The rest of the cabin's fittings were not remarkable. By the configuration of the ship I guessed that two of the staterooms must be rather large. I could make out voices within.

On deck I talked with Captain Selover.

"She's a snug craft," I approached him.

He nodded.

"You have armed her well."

He muttered something of pirates and the China seas.

I laughed.

"You have arms enough to give your crew about two magazine rifles apiece—unless you filled all your berths forward!"

Captain Selover looked me direct in the eye.

"Talk straight, Mr. Eagen," said he.

"What is this ship, and where is she bound?" I asked, with equal simplicity.

He considered.

"As for the ship," he replied at length, "I don't mind saying. You're my first officer, and on you I depend if it comes to—well, the small arms below. If the ship's a little under the shade, why, so are you.

She's by way of being called a manner of hard names by some people. I do not see it myself. It is a matter of conscience. If you would ask some interested, they would call her a smuggler, a thief, a wrecker, and all the other evil titles in the catalogue. She has taken in Chinks by way of Santa Cruz Island—if that is smuggling. The country is free, and a Chink is a man. Besides, it paid ten dollars a head for the landing. She has carried in a cargo or so of junk; it was lying on the beach where a fool master had piled it, and I took what I found. I couldn't keep track of the underwriters' intentions."

"But the room forward——?" I broke in.

"Well, you see, last season we were pearl fishing."

"But you needed only your diver and your crew," I objected.

"There was the matter of a Japanese gunboat or so," he explained.

"Poaching!" I cried.

"So some call it. The shells are there. The islands are not inhabited. I do not see how men claim property beyond the tide water. I have heard it argued——"

"Hold on!" I cried. "There was a trouble last year in the Ishigaki Jima Islands where a poacher beat off the *Oyama*. It was a desperate fight."

Captain Selover's eye lit up.

"I've commanded a black brigantine, name of *The Petrel*," he admitted simply. "She was a brigantine aloft, but *alow* she had much the same lines as the *Laughing Lass*." He whirled on his heel to roll to one of the covered yacht's cannon. "Looks like a

harmless little toy to burn black powder, don't she?" he remarked. He stripped off the tarpaulin and the false brass muzzle to display as pretty a little Maxim as you would care to see. "Now you know all about it," he said.

"Look here, Captain Selover," I demanded, "don't you know that I could blow your whole shooting-match higher than Gilderoy's kite. How do you know I won't do it when I get back? How do you know I won't inform the doctor at once what kind of an outfit he has tied to?"

He planted far apart his thick legs in their soiled blue trousers, pushed back his greasy linen boating hat and stared at me with some amusement.

"How do you know I won't blow on Lieutenant or Ensign Ralph Slade, U. S. N., when I get back?" he demanded. I blessed that illusion, anyway. "Besides, I know my man. You won't do anything of the sort." He walked to the rail and spat carefully over the side.

"As for the doctor," he went on, "*he* knows all about it. He told me all about myself, and everything I had ever done from the time I'd licked Buck Jones until last season's little diversion. Then he told me that was why he wanted me to ship for this cruise." The captain eyed me quizzically.

I threw out my hands in a comic gesture of surrender.

"Well, where are we bound, anyway?"

The dirty, unkempt, dishevelled figure stiffened.

"Mr. Eagen," its falsetto shrilled, "you are mate of this vessel. Your duty is to see that my orders as

to sailing are carried out. Beyond that you do not go. As to navigation, and latitude and longitude and where the hell we are, that is outside your line of duty. As to where we are bound, you are getting double wages not to get too damn curious. Remember to earn your wages, Mr. Eagen!"

He turned away to the binnacle. In spite of his personal filth, in spite of the lawless, almost piratical, character of the man, in that moment I could not but admire him. If Percy Darrow was ignorant of the purposes of this expedition, how much more so Captain Selover. Yet he accepted his trust blindly, and as far as I could then see, intended to fulfil it faithfully. I liked him none the worse for snubbing me. It indicated a streak in his moral nature akin to and quite as curious as his excessive neatness regarding his immediate surroundings.

IV

THE STEEL CLAW

DURING the next few days the crew discussed our destination. Discipline, while maintained strictly, was not conventional. During the dog watches, often, every man aboard would be below, for at that period Captain Selover loved to take the wheel in person, a thick cigar between his lips, the dingy checked shirt wide open to expose his hairy chest to the breeze. In the twilight of the forecastle we had some great sea-lawyer's talks—I say "We," though I took little part in them. Generally I lay across my bunk smoking my pipe while Handy Solomon held forth, his speech punctuated by surly speculations from the Nigger, with hesitating deep-sea wisdom from the hairy Thrackles, or with voluminous bursts of fractured English from Perdosa. Pulz had nothing to offer, but watched from his pale green eyes. The light shifted and wavered from one to the other as the ship swayed: garments swung; the empty berths yawned cavernous. I could imagine the forecastle filled with the desperate men who had beaten off the *Oyama*. The story is told that they had swept the gunboat's decks with her own rapid-fires, turned in.

No one knew where we were going, nor why. The doctor puzzled them, and the quantity of his belongings.

"It ain't pearls," said Handy Solomon. "You can kiss the Book on that, for we ain't a diver among us. It ain't Chinks, for we are cruising sou'-sou'-west. Likely it's trade,—trade down in the Islands."

We were all below. The captain himself had the wheel. Discipline, while strict, was not conventional.

"Contrabandista," muttered the Mexican, "for dat he geev us double pay."

"We don't get her for nothing," agreed Thrackles. "Double pay and duff on Wednesday generally means get your head broke."

"No trade," said the Nigger gloomily.

They turned to him with one accord.

"Why not?" demanded Pulz, breaking his silence.

"No trade," repeated the Nigger.

"Ain't you got a reason, Doctor?" asked Handy Solomon.

"No trade," insisted the Nigger.

An uneasy silence fell. I could not but observe that the others held the Nigger's statements in a respect not due them as mere opinions. Subsequently I understood a little more of the reputation he possessed. He was believed to see things hidden, as their phrase went.

Nobody said anything for some time; nobody stirred, except that Handy Solomon, his steel claw removed from its socket, whittled and tested, screwed and turned, trying to fix the hook so that, in accordance with the advice of Percy Darrow, it would turn either way.

"What is it, then, Doctor?" he asked softly at last.

"Gold," said the Nigger shortly. "Gold—treasure."

"That's what I said at first!" cried Handy Solomon triumphantly. It was extraordinary, the unquestioning and entire faith with which they accepted as gospel fact the negro's dictum.

There followed much talk of the nature of this treasure, whether it was to be sought or conveyed, bought, stolen, or ravished in fair fight. No further soothsaying could they elicit from the Nigger. They followed their own ideas, which led them nowhere. Someone lit the fore-castle lamp. They settled themselves. Pulz read aloud.

This was the programme every day during the dog watch. Sometimes the watch on deck was absent, leaving only Handy Solomon, the Nigger and Pulz, but the order of the day was not on that account varied. They talked, they lit the lamp, they read: Always the talk was of the treasure.

As to the reading, it was of the sort usual to seamen, cowboys, lumbermen, and miners. Thrackles had a number of volumes of very cheap love stories. Pulz had brought some extraordinary garish detective stories. The others contributed sensational literature with paper covers adorned lithographically. By the usual incongruity a fragment of *The Marble Faun* was included in the collection. The Nigger has his copy of *Duvall on Alchemy*. I haven't the slightest idea where he could have got it.

While Pulz read, Handy Solomon worked on the alteration of his claw. He could never get it to hold, and I remember as an undertone to Pulz's reading, the rumble of strange, exasperated oaths. Whatever the evening's lecture, it always ended with the book on

alchemy. These men had no perspective by which to judge such things. They accepted its speculations and theories at their face value. Extremely laughable were the discussions that followed. I often wished the shade of old Duvall could be permitted to see these, his last disciples, spelling out dimly his teachings, mispronouncing his grave utterances, but believing utterly.

Dr. Schermerhorn appeared on deck seldom. When he did, often his fingers held a pen which he had forgotten to lay aside. I imagined him preoccupied by some calculation of his own, but the forecabin, more picturesquely, saw him as guarding constantly the heavy casket he had himself carried aboard. He breathed the air, walked briskly, turned with the German military precision at the end of his score of strides, and re-entered his cabin at the lapse of the half hour. After he had gone, remained Percy Darrow leaning indolently against the taffrail, his graceful figure swaying with the ship's motion, smoking always the corn-husk Mexican cigarettes which he rolled with one hand. He seemed from that farthest point aft to hold in review the appliances, the fabric, the actions, yes, even the very thoughts, of the entire ship. From them he selected that on which he should comment or with which he should play, always with a sardonic, half-serious, quite wearied and indifferent manner. His inner knowledge, viewed by the light of this manner or mannerism, was sometimes uncanny, though perhaps the sources of his information were commonplace enough, after all. Certainly he always viewed with amusement his victim's wonder.

Thus one evening at the close of our day-watch on deck, he approached Handy Solomon. It was at the end of ten days, on no one of which had the seaman failed to tinker away at his steel claw. Darrow balanced in front of him with a thin smile.

"Too bad it doesn't work, my amiable pirate," said he. "It would be so handy for fighting—— See here," he suddenly continued, pulling some object from his pocket, "here's a pipe; present to me; I don't smoke 'em. Twist her halfway, like that, she comes out. Twist her halfway, like this, she goes in. That's your principle. Give her back to me when you get through."

He thrust the briar pipe into the man's hand, and turned away without waiting for a reply. The seaman looked after him in open amazement. That evening he worked on the socket of the steel hook, and in two days he had the job finished. Then he returned the pipe to Darrow with some growling of thanks.

"That's all right," said the young man, smiling full at him. "Now what are you going to fight?"

V

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

CAPTAIN SELOVER received as his due the most absolute and implicit obedience imaginable. When he condescended to give an order in his own person, the men fairly jumped to execute it. The matter had evidently been threshed out long ago. They did not love him, not they; but they feared him with a mighty fear, and did not hesitate to say so, vividly, and often, when in the privacy of the fore-castle. The prevailing spirit was that of the wild beast, cowed but snarling still. Pulz and Thrackles in especial had a great deal to say of what they were or were not going to do, but I noticed that their resolution always began to run out of them when first foot was set to the companion ladder.

One day we were loafing along, everything drawing well, and everybody but the doctor on deck to enjoy the sun. I was in the crow's-nest for my pleasure. Below me on the deck Captain Selover roamed here and there, as was his custom, his eye cocked out like a housewife's for disorder. He found it, again in the evidence of expectoration, and as Perdosa happened to be handiest, fell on the unfortunate Mexican.

Perdosa protested that he had had nothing to do with it, but Captain Selover, enraged as always when his precious deck was soiled, would not listen. Finally the Mexican grew sulky and turned away as

though refusing to hear more. The captain thereupon felled him to the deck, and began brutally to kick him in the face and head.

Perdosa writhed and begged, but without avail. The other members of the crew gathered near. After a moment, they began to murmur. Finally Thrackles ventured, most respectfully, to intervene.

"You'll kill him, sir," he interposed. "He's had enough."

"Had enough, has he?" screeched the captain. "Well, you take what's left."

He marked Thrackles heavily over the eye. There was a breathless pause; and then Thrackles, Pulz, the Nigger, and Perdosa attacked at once.

They caught the master unawares, and bore him to the deck. I dropped at once to the ratlines, and commenced my descent. Before I had reached the deck, however, Selover was afoot again, the four hanging to him like dogs. In a moment more he had shaken them off; and before I could intervene, he had seized a belaying pin in either hand, and was hazing them up and down the deck.

"Mutiny, would you?" he shrilled. "You poor swabs! Forgot who was your captain, did ye? Well, it's Captain Ezra Selover, and you can lay to that! It would need about eight fathom of *stuff* like you to tie me down."

He chased them forward, and he chased them aft, and every time the pins fell, blood followed. Finally they dived like rabbits into the forecastle hatch. Captain Selover leaned down after them.

"Now tie yourselves up," he advised, "and then

come on deck and clean up after yourselves!" He turned to me. "Mr. Eagen, turn out the crew to clean decks."

I descended to the forecastle, followed immediately by Handy Solomon. The latter had taken no part in the affair. We found the men in horrible shape, what with the bruises and cuts, and bleeding freely.

"Now you're a nice-looking Sunday school!" observed Handy Solomon, eyeing them sardonically. "Tackel Old Scrubs, will ye? Well, some needs a bale of cotton to fall on 'em afore they learns anything. Enjoyed your little diversions, mates? And w'at do you expect to gain? I asks you that, now. You poor little infants! Ain't you never tackled him afore? Don't remember a little brigatine, name of the *Petrel*? My eye, but you *are* a pack of damn fools!"

To this he received no reply. The men sullenly assisted each other. Then they went immediately on deck and to work.

After this taste of his quality, Captain Selover enjoyed a quiet ship. We made good time, but for a long while nothing happened. Finally the monotony was broken by an incident.

One evening before the night winds I sat in the shadow of the extra dory on top of the deck house. The moon was but just beyond the full, so I suppose I must have been practically invisible. Certainly the Nigger did not know of my presence, for he came and stood within three feet of me without giving any sign. The companion was open. In a moment some door below was opened also, and a scrap of conversation came up to us very clearly.

"You haf dem finished?" the doctor's voice inquired. "So, that iss well,"—papers rustled for a few moments. "And the r-result—ah—exactly—it iss that exactly. Percy, mein son, that maigs the experiment exact. We haf the process——"

"I don't see, sir, quite," replied the voice of Percy Darrow, with a tinge of excitement. "I can follow the logic of the experiment, of course—so can I follow the logic of a trip to the moon. But when you come to apply it—how do you get your re-agent? There's no known method——"

Dr. Schermerhorn broke in: "Ach, it iss that I haf perfected. Pardon me, my boy, it iss the first I haf worked from you apart. It iss for a surprise. I haf made in small quantities the missing ingredient. It will form a perfect interruption to the current. Now we go——"

"Do you mean to say," almost shouted Darrow, "that you have succeeded in freeing it in the metal?"

"Yes," replied the doctor simply.

I could hear a chair overturned.

"Why, with that you can——"

"I can do efferything," broke in the doctor. "The possibilities are enormous."

"And you can really produce it in quantity?"

"I think so; it iss for us to discover."

A pause ensued.

"Why!" came the voice of Percy Darrow, awe-stricken. "With fifty centigrammes only you could—you could transmute any substance—why, you could make anything you pleased almost! You could make

enough diamonds to fill that chest! It is the philosopher's stone!"

"Diamonds—yes—it is possible," interrupted the doctor impatiently, "if it was worth while. But you should see the real importance——"

The ship careened to a chance swell; a door slammed; the voices were cut off. I looked up. The Nigger's head was thrust forward fairly into the glow from the companionway. The mask of his sullenness had fallen. His eyes fairly rolled in excitement, his thick lips were drawn back to expose his teeth, his powerful figure was gathered with the tensivity of a bow. When the door slammed, he turned silently to glide away. At that instant the watch was changed, and in a moment I found myself in my bunk.

Ten seconds later the Nigger, detained by Captain Selover for some trifling duty, burst into the fore-castle. He was possessed by the wildest excitement. This in itself was enough to gain the attention of the men, but his first words were startling.

"I found de treasure!" he almost shouted. "I know where he kept!"

They leaped at him—Handy Solomon and Pulz—and fairly shook out of him what he thought he knew. He babbled in the forgotten terms of alchemy, dressing modern facts in the garments of mediæval thought until they were scarcely to be recognised.

"And so he say dat he fine him, de Philosopher Stone, and he keep him in dat heavy box we see him carry aboard, and he don' have to make gol' with it—he can make diamon's—*diamon's*—he say it too easy to fill dat box plum full of diamon's."

They gesticulated and exclaimed and breathed hard, full of the marvel of such a thought. Then abruptly the clamour died to nothing. I felt six eyes bent on me, six unwinking eyes moving restless in motionless figures, suspicious, deadly as cobras——

Up to now my standing with the men had been well enough. Now they drew frankly apart. One of the most significant indications of this was the increased respect they paid my office. It was as though by prompt obedience, instant deference, and the emphasising of ship's etiquette they intended to draw sharply the line between themselves and me. There was much whispering apart, many private talks and consultations in which I had no part. Ordinarily they talked freely enough before me. Even the reading during the dog watch was intermitted—at least it was on such days as I happened to be in the watch below. But twice I caught the Nigger and Handy Solomon consulting together over the volume on alchemy.

I was in two minds whether to report the whole matter to Captain Selover. The only thing that restrained me was the vagueness of the intention, and the fact that the afterguard was armed, and was four to the crew's five. An incident, however, decided me. One evening I was awakened by a sound of violent voices. Captain Selover occasionally juggled the watches for variety's sake, and I now had Handy Solomon and Perdosa. The Nigger, being cook, stood no watch.

"You drunken Greaser swab!" snarled Handy Soiomon. "You misbegotten son of a Yaqui! I'll learn you to step on a seaman's foot, and you can kiss

the Book on that! I'll cut your heart out and feed it to the sharks!"

"Potha!" sneered Perdosa. "You cut heem you finger wid your knife."

They wrangled. At first I thought the quarrel genuine, but after a moment or so I could not avoid a sort of reminiscent impression of the cheap melodrama. It seemed incredible, but soon I could not dodge the conclusion that it was a made-up quarrel designed to impress me.

Why should they desire to do so? I had to give it up, but the fact itself was obvious enough. I laughed to see them. The affair did not come to blows, but it did come to black looks on meeting, muttered oaths, growls of enmity every time they happened to pass each other on the deck. Perdosa was not so bad; his Mexican blood inclined him to the histrionic, and his Mexican cast lent itself well to evil looks. But Handy Solomon, for the first time in my acquaintance with him, was ridiculous.

About this time we crossed into frequent thunders. One evening just at dark we made out a heavy black squall. Not knowing exactly what weight lay behind it, I called up all hands. We ducked the staysail and foresail, lowered the peak of the mainsail, and waited to feel of it—a rough and ready seamanship often used in these little California wind-jammers. I was pretty busy, but I heard distinctly Handy Solomon's voice behind me.

"I'll kill you sure, you Greaser, as soon as my hands are free!"

And some muttered reply from the Mexican.

The wind hit us hard, held on a few moments, and moderated to a stiff puff. There followed the rain, so of course I knew it would amount to nothing. I was just stooping to throw the stops off the staysail when I felt myself seized from behind, and forced rapidly toward the side of the ship.

Of course I struggled. The Japanese have a little trick to fool a man who catches you around the waist from behind. It is part of the jiu-jitsu taught the Samurai—quite a different proposition from the ordinary “policeman jiu-jitsu.” I picked it up from a friend in the nobility. It came in very handy now, and by good luck a roll of the ship helped me. In a moment I stood free, and Perdosa was picking himself out of the scuppers.

The expression of astonishment was fairly well done—I will say that for him—but I was prepared for histrionics.

“Señor!” he gasped. “Eet is you! *Sacrosanta Maria!* I thought you was dat Solomon! Pardon me, señor! Pardon! Have I hurt you?”

He approached me almost wheedling. I could have laughed at the villain. It was all so transparent. He no more mistook me for Handy Solomon than he felt any real enmity for that person. But being angry, and perhaps a little scared, I beat him to his quarters with a belaying pin.

On thinking the matter over, however, I failed to see all the ins and outs of it. I could understand a desire to get rid of me; there would be one less of the afterguard, and then, too, I knew too much of the men's sentiments, if not of their plans. But why all

this elaborate farce of the mock quarrel and the alleged mistake? Could it be to guard against possible failure? I could hardly think it worth while. My only theory was that they had wished to test my strength and determination. The whole affair, even on that supposition, was childish enough, but I referred the exaggerated cunning to Handy Solomon, and considered it quite adequately explained. It is a minor point, but subsequently I learned that this surmise was correct. I was to be saved because none of the conspirators understood navigation.

The next morning I approached Captain Selover.

"Captain," said I, "I think it my duty to report that there is trouble brewing among the crew."

"There always is," he replied, unmoved.

"But this is serious. Dr. Schermerhorn came aboard with a chest which the men think holds treasure. The other evening Robinson overheard him tell his assistant that he could easily fill the box with diamonds. Of course, he was merely illustrating the value of some scientific experiment, but Robinson thinks, and has made the others think, that the chest contains something to make diamonds with. I am sure they intend to get hold of it. The affair is coming to a head."

Captain Selover listened almost indifferently.

"I came back from the islands last year," he piped, "with three hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls. There was sixteen in the crew, and every man of them was blood hungry for them pearls. They had three or four shindies and killed one man over the proper way to divide the loot after they had got it. They didn't

get it. Why?" He drew his powerful figure to its height and spread his thick arms out in the luxury of stretching. "Why?" he repeated, exhaling abruptly. "Because their captain was Ezra Selover! Well, Mr. Eagen," he went on crisply, "Captain Ezra Selover is their captain, *and they know it!* They'll talk and palaver and git into dark corners, and sharpen their knives, and perhaps fight it out as to which one's going to work the monkey-doodle business in the doctor's chest, and which one's going to tie up the sacks of them diamonds, but they won't git any farther as long as Captain Ezra is on deck."

"Yes," I objected, "but they mean business. Last night in the squall one of them tried to throw me overboard."

Captain Selover grinned.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"Hazed him to his quarters with a belaying pin."

"Well, that's all settled then, isn't it? What more do you want?"

stood undecided.

"I can take care of myself," he went on. "You ought to take care of yourself. Then there's nothing more to do."

He mused a moment.

"You have a gun, of course?" he inquired. "I forgot to ask."

"No," said I.

He whistled.

"Well, no wonder you feel sort of lost and hopeless! Here, take this, it'll make a man of you."

He gave me a Colt's 45, the barrel of which had

been filed down to about two inches of length. It was a most extraordinary weapon, but effective at short range.

"Here's a few loose cartridges," said he. "Now go easy. This is no warship, and we ain't got men to experiment on. Lick 'em with your fists or a pin, if you can; and if you do shoot, for God's sake just wing 'em a little. They're awful good lads, but a little restless."

I took the gun and felt better. With it I could easily handle the members of my own watch, and I did not doubt that with the assistance of Percy Darrow even a surprise would hardly overwhelm us. I did not count on Dr. Schermerhorn. He was quite capable of losing himself in a problem of trajectory after the first shot.

VI

THE ISLAND

I CAME on deck one morning at about four bells to find the entire ship's company afoot. Even the doctor was there. Everybody was gazing eagerly at a narrow, mountainous island lying slate-coloured across the early morning.

We were as yet some twenty miles distant from it, and could make out nothing but its general outline. The latter was sharply defined, rising and falling to a highest point one side of the middle. Over the island, and raggedly clasping its sides, hung a cloud, the only one visible in the sky.

I joined the afterguard.

"You see?" the doctor was exclaiming. "It iss as I haf said. The island iss there. Everything iss as it should be!" He was quite excited.

Percy Darrow, too, was shaken out of his ordinary calm.

"The volcano is active," was his only comment, but it explained the ragged cloud.

"You say there's a harbour?" inquired Captain Selover.

"It should be on the west end," said Dr. Schermerhorn.

Captain Selover drew me one side. He, too was a little aroused.

"Now wouldn't that get you?" he squeaked. "Doctor runs up against a Norwegian bum who tells him about a volcanic island, and gives its bearings. The island ain't on the map at all. Doctor believes it, and makes me lay my course for those bearings. *And here's the island!* So the bum's story was true! I'd like to know what the rest of it was!" His eyes were shining.

"Do we anchor or stand off and on?" I asked.

Captain Selover turned to grip me by the shoulder.

"I have orders from Darrow to get to a good berth, to land, to build shore quarters, and to snug down for a stay of a year at least!"

We stared at each other.

"Joyous prospect," I muttered. "Hope there's something to do there."

The morning wore, and we rapidly approached the island. It proved to be utterly precipitous. The high rounded hills sloped easily to within a hundred feet or so of the water and then fell away abruptly. Where the earth ended was a fantastic filigree border, like the fancy paper with which our mothers used to line the pantry shelves. Below, the white surges flung themselves against the cliffs with a wild abandon. Thousands of sea birds wheeled in the eddies of the wind, thousands of ravens perched on the slopes. With our glasses we could make out the heads of seals fishing outside the surf, and a ragged belt of kelp.

When within a mile we put the helm up, and ran for the west end. A bold point we avoided far out, lest there should be outlying ledges. Then we came in sight of a broad beach and pounding surf.

I was ordered to take a surf boat and investigate for a landing and an anchorage. The swell was running high. We rowed back and forth, puzzled as to how to get ashore with all the freight it would be necessary to land. The ship would lie well enough, for the only open exposure was broken by a long reef over which we could make out the seas tumbling. But inshore the great waves rolled smoothly, swiftly—then suddenly fell forward as over a ledge, and spread with a roar across the yellow sands. The fresh winds blew the spume back to us. We conversed in shouts.

"We can surf the boat," yelled Thrackles, "but we can't land a load."

That was my opinion. We rowed slowly along, parallel to the shore, and just outside the line of breakers.

I don't know exactly how to tell you the manner in which we became aware of the cove. It was as nearly the instantaneous as can be imagined. One minute I looked ahead on a cliff as unbroken as the side of a cabin; the very next I peered down the length of a cove fifty fathoms long by about ten wide, at the end of which was a gravel beach. I cried out sharply to the men. They were quite as much astonished as I. We backed water, watching closely. At a given point the cove and all trace of its entrance disappeared. We could only just make out the line where the headlands dissolved into the background of the cliffs, and that merely because we knew of its existence. The blending was perfect.

We rowed in. The water was still. A faint ebb and flow whispered against the tiny gravel beach at the

end. I noted a practicable way from it to the top of the cliff, and from the cliff down again to the sand beach. Everything was perfect. The water was a beautiful light green, like semi-opaque glass, and from the indistinctness of its depths waved and beckoned, rose and disappeared with indescribable grace and deliberation long feathery sea growths. In a moment the bottom abruptly shallowed. The motion of the boat toward the beach permitted us to catch a hasty glimpse of little fish darting, of big fish turning, of yellow sand and some vivid colour. Then came the grate of gravel and the scraping of the boat's bottom on the beach.

We jumped ashore eagerly. I left the men, very reluctant, and ascended a natural trail to a high sloping down over which blew the great Trades. Grass sprung knee-high. A low hill rose at the back. From below the fall of the cliff came the pounding of surf.

I walked to the edge. Various ledges, sloping toward me, ran down to the sea. Against one of them was a wreck, not so very old, head on, her afterworks gone. I recognised the name *Golden Horn*, and was vastly astonished to find her here against this unknown island. Far up the coast I could see—with the surges dashing up like the explosion of shells, and the cliffs, and the rampart of hills grown with grass and cactus. A bold promontory terminated the coast view to the north, and behind it I could glimpse a more fertile and wooded country. The sky was partly overcast by the volcanic murk. It fled before the Trades, and the red sun alternately blazed and clouded through it.

As there was nothing more to be seen here, I turned

above the hollow of our cove, skirted the base of the hill, and so down to the beach.

It occupied a wide semicircle where the hills drew back. The flat was dry and grown with thick, coarse grass. A stream emerged from a sort of cañon on its landward side. I tasted it, found it sulphurous, and a trifle worse than lukewarm. A little nearer the cliff, however, was a clear, cold spring from the rock, and of this I had a satisfying drink. When I arose from my knees, I made out an animal on the hill crest looking at me, but before I could distinguish its characteristics it had disappeared.

I returned along the tide sands. The surf dashed and roared, lifting seaweeds of a blood red, so that in places the water looked pink. Seals innumerable watched me from just outside the breakers. As the waves lifted to a semi-transparence, I could make out others playing, darting back and forth, up and down like disturbed tadpoles, clinging to the wave until the very instant of its fall, then disappearing as though blotted out. The salt smell of seaweed was in my nostrils: I found the place pleasant——

With these few and scattered impressions we returned to the ship. It had been warped to a secure anchorage, and snugged down. Dr. Schermerhorn and Darrow were on deck waiting to go ashore.

I made my report. The two passengers disappeared. They carried lunch and would not be back until night-fall. We had orders to pitch a large tent at a suitable spot and to lighten ship of the doctor's personal and scientific effects. By the time this was accomplished, the two had returned.

"It's all right," Darrow volunteered to Captain Selover, as he came over the side. "We've found what we want."

Their clothes were picked by brush and their boots muddy. Next morning Captain Selover detailed me to especial work.

"You'll take two of the men and go ashore under Darrow's orders," said he.

Darrow told us to take clothes for a week, an axe apiece, and a block and tackle. We made up our ditty bags, stepped into one of the surf boats, and were rowed ashore. There Darrow at once took the lead.

Our way proceeded across the grass flat, through the opening of the narrow cañon, and so on back into the interior by way of the bed through which flowed the sulphur stream. The country was badly eroded. Most of the time we marched between perpendicular clay banks about forty feet high. These were occasionally broken by smaller tributary arroyos of the same sort. It would have been impossible to reach the level of the upper country. The bed of the main arroyo was flat, and grown with grasses and herbage of an extraordinary vividness, due, I supposed, to the sulphur water. The stream itself meandered aimlessly through the broader bed. It steadily grew warmer and the sulphur smell more noticeable. Above us we could see the sky and the sharp clay edge of the arroyo. I noticed the tracks of Darrow and Dr. Schermerhorn made the day before.

After a mile of this, the bottom ran up nearly to the level of the sides, and we stepped out on the floor of a little valley almost surrounded by more hills.

It was an extraordinary place, and since much happened there, I must give you an idea of it.

It was round and nearly encircled by naked painted hills. From its floor came steam and a roaring sound. The steam blew here and there among the pines on the floor; rose to eddy about the naked painted hills. At one end we saw intermittently a broad ascending cañon—deep red and blue-black—ending in the cone of a smoking volcano. The other seemed quite closed by the sheer hills; in fact the only exit was the route by which we had come.

For the hills were utterly precipitous. I suppose a man might have made his way up the various knobs, ledges, and inequalities, but it would have required long study and a careful head. I, myself, later worked my way a short distance, merely to examine the texture of their marvellous colour.

This was at once varied and of great body—not at all like the smooth, glossed colour of most rock, but soft and rich. You've seen painters' palettes—it was just like that, pasty and *fat*. There were reds of all shades, from a veritable scarlet to a red umber; greens, from sea-green to emerald; several kinds of blue, and an indeterminate purple-muave. The whole effect was splendid and barbaric.

We stopped and gasped as it hit our eyes. Darrow alone was unmoved. He led the way forward and in an instant had disappeared behind the veil of steam. Thrackles and Perdosa hung back murmuring, but at a sharp word from me gathered their courage in their two hands and proceeded.

We found that the first veil of steam, and a fearful

stench of gases, proceeded from a miniature crater whose edge was heavily encrusted with a white salt. Beyond, close under the rise of the hill, was another. Between the two Percy Darrow had stopped and was waiting.

He eyed us with his lazy, half-quizzical glance as we approached.

"Think the place is going to blow up?" he inquired, with a tinge of irony. "Well, it isn't." He turned to me. "Here's where we shall stay for a while. You and the men are to cut a number of these pine trees for a house. Better pick out the little ones, about three or four inches through: they're easier handled. I'll be back by noon."

We set to work then in the roaring, steaming valley with the vapour swirling about us, sometimes concealing us, sometimes half revealing us gigantic, again in the utterness of exposure showing us dwindled pigmies against the magnitudes about us. The labour was not difficult. By the time Darrow returned we had a pile of the saplings ready for his next direction.

He was accompanied by the Nigger, very much terrified, very much burdened with food and cooking utensils. The assistant was lazily relating tales of voodooos, a glimmer of mischief in his eyes.

VII

CAPTAIN SELOVER LOSES HIS NERVE

I LIVED in the place for three weeks. We were afoot shortly after daybreak, under way by sun-up, and at work before the heats began. Three of us worked on the buildings, and the rest formed a pack train carrying all sorts of things from the shore to the valley. The men grumbled fiercely at this, but Captain Selover drove them with slight regard for their opinions or feelings.

"You're getting double pay," was his only word, "earn it!"

They certainly earned it during those three weeks. The things they brought up were astounding. Besides a lot of scientific apparatus and chests of chemical supplies, everything that could possibly be required, had been provided by that omniscient young man. After we had built a long, low structure, windows were forthcoming, shelves, tables, sinks, faucets, forges, burners, all cut out, fitted and ready to put together, each with its proper screws, nails, clamps, or pipes ready to our hands. When we had finished, we had constructed as complete a laboratory on a small scale as you could find on a college campus, even to the stone pillar down to bed-rock for delicate microscopic experiments, and hot and cold water led from the springs. And we were utterly unskilled. It was all Percy Darrow.

I was toward the last engaged in screwing on a fixture for the generation of acetelyne gas.

"Darrow," said I, "there's one thing you've overlooked; you forgot to bring a cupola and a gilt weather-cock for this concern."

After the laboratory was completed, we put up sleeping quarters for the two men, with wide porches well screened, and a square, heavy storeroom. By the end of the third week we had quite finished.

Dr. Schermerhorn had turned with enthusiasm to the unpacking of his chemical apparatus. Almost immediately at the close of the freight-carrying, he had appeared, lugging his precious chest, this time suffering the assistance of Darrow, and had camped on the spot. We could not induce him to leave, so we put up a tent for him. Darrow remained with him by way of safety against the men, whose measure, I believe, he had taken. Now that all the work was finished, the doctor put in a sudden appearance.

"Percy," said he, "now we will have the defence built."

He dragged us with him to the narrow part of the arroyo, just before it rose to the level of the valley.

"Here we will build the stockade-defence," he announced.

Darrow and I stared at each other blankly.

"What for, sir?" inquired the assistant.

"I haf come to be undisturbed," announced the doctor, with owl-like, Teutonic gravity, "and I will not be disturbed."

Darrow nodded to me and drew his principal aside.

They conversed earnestly for several minutes. Then the assistant returned to me.

"No use," he shrugged in complete return to his indifferent manner. "Stockade it is. Better make it of fourteen foot logs, slanted out. Dig a trench across, plant your logs three or four feet, bind them at the top. That's his specification for it. Go at it."

"But," I expostulated, "what's the *use* of it? Even if the men were dangerous, that would just make them think you *did* have something to guard."

"I know that. Orders," replied Percy Darrow.

We built the stockade in a day. When it was finished we marched to the beach, and never, save in the three instances of which I shall later tell you, did I see the valley again. The next day we washed our clothes, and moved ashore with all our belongings.

"I'm not going to have this crew aboard," stated Captain Selover positively, "I'm going to clean her." He himself stayed, however.

We rowed in, constructed a hasty fireplace of stones, spread our blankets, and built an unnecessary fire near the beach.

"Clean her!" grumbled Thrackles, "my eye!"

"I'd rather round the Cape," growled Pulz hopelessly.

"Come, now, it can't be as bad as all that," I tried to cheer them. "It can't be more than a week or ten days' job, even if we careen her."

"You don't know what you're talking about," said Thrackles. "It's worse than the yellow jack. It's six weeks at least. Mind when we last 'cleaned her'?" he inquired of Handy Solomon.

"You can kiss the Book on it," replied he. "Down by the line in that little swab of a sand island. My eye, but *don't* I remember! I sweated my liver white."

They smoked in silence.

"That's a main queer contrivance of the Perfessor's—that stockade-like," ventured Solomon, after a little.

"He doesn't want any intrusion," I said. "These scientific experiments are very delicate."

"Quite like," he commented non-committally.

We slept on the ground that night, and next morning, under Captain Selover's directions, we commenced the task of lightening the ship. He detailed the Nigger and Perdosa for special duty.

"I'll just see to your shore quarters," he squeaked. "You empty her."

All day long we rowed back and forth from the ship to the cove, landing the contents of the hold. These, by good fortune, we did not have to carry over the neck of land, for just above the gravel beach was a wide ledge on which we could pile the stores. We ate aboard, and so had no opportunity of seeing what Captain Selover and his men were about, until evening. Then we discovered that they had collected and lowered to the beach a quantity of stateroom doors from the wreck, and had trundled the galley stove to the edge where it awaited our assistance. We hitched a cable to it, and let it down gently. The Nigger was immensely pleased. After some experiment he got it to draw, and so cooked us our supper on it. After supper, Captain Selover rowed himself back to the ship.

"Eagen," he had said, drawing me aside, "I'm go-

ing to leave you with them. It's better that one of us—I think as owner I ought to be aboard——”

“Of course, sir,” said I, “it's the only proper place for you.”

“I'm glad you think so,” he rejoined, apparently relieved. “And anyway,” he cried, with a burst of feeling, “I hate the gritty feeling of it under my feet! Solid oak's the only walking for a man.”

He left me hastily, as though a trifle ashamed. I thought he seemed depressed, even a little furtive, and yet on analysis I could discover nothing definite on which to base such a conclusion.

It was rather a feeling of difference from the man I had known. In my fatigue it seemed hardly worth thinking about.

The men had rolled themselves in their blankets, tired with the long day.

Next morning Captain Selover was ashore early. He had quite recovered his spirits, and offered me a dram of French brandy, which I refused. We worked hard again; again the master returned at night to his vessel, this time without a word to any of us; again the men, drugged by toil, turned in early and slept like the dead.

We became entangled in a mesh of days like these, during which things were accomplished, but in which was no space for anything but the tasks imposed upon us. The men for the most part had little to say.

“Por Dios, eet is too mooch work!” sighed Perdosa once.

“Why don't you kick to the Old Man, then?” sneered Thrackles.

The silence that followed, and the sullenness with which Perdosa readdressed himself to his work, was significant enough of Captain Selover's past relations with the men.

And how we did clean her! We stripped her of every stitch and sliver until she floated high, an empty hull, even her spars and running rigging ashore. I understood now the crew's grumbling. We literally went at her with a nail brush.

Captain Selover took charge of us when we had reached this period. He and the Nigger and Perdosa had long since finished the installation of the permanent camp. They had built us huts from the wreck, collecting stateroom doors for the sides, and hatches for the roofs, huge and solid, with iron rings in them. The bronze and iron ventilation gratings to the doors gave us glimpses of the coast through fretwork; the rich inlaying of woods surrounded us. We set up on a solid rock the galley stove—with its rails to hold the cooking pots from upsetting, in a sea way. In it we burned the débris of the wreck, all sorts of wood, some sweet and aromatic and spicy as an incensed cathedral. I have seen the Nigger boiling beans over a blaze of sandal wood fragrant as an Eastern shop.

First we scrubbed the *Laughing Lass*, then we painted her, and resized and tarred her standing rigging, resized and rove her running gear, slushed her masts, finally careened her and scraped and painted her below.

When we had quite finished, we had the anchor chain dealt out to us in fathoms, and scraped, pounded

and polished that. These were indeed days full of labour.

Being busy from morning until night we knew but little of what was about us. We saw the open sea and the waves tumbling over the reef outside. We saw the headlands, and the bow of the bay and the surf with its watching seals and the curve of yellow sands. We saw the sweep of coast and the downs and the strange huts we had built out of departed magnificence, And that was all; that constituted our world.

In the evening sometimes we lit a big bonfire, sailor fashion, just at the edge of the beach. There we sat at ease and smoked our pipes in silence, too tired to talk. Even Handy Solomon's song was still. Outside the circle of light were mysterious things—strange wavings of white hands, bendings of figures, callings of voices, rustling of feet. We knew them for the surf and the wind in the grasses: but they were not the less mysterious for that.

Logically Captain Selover and I should have passed most of our evenings together. As a matter of fact we so spent very few. Early in the dusk the captain invariably rowed himself out to his beloved schooner. What he did there I do not know. We could see his light now in one part of her, now in the other. The men claimed he was scrubbing her teeth. "Old Scrubs" they called him to his back: never Captain Selover.

"He has to clean up after his own feet, he's so dirty," sagely proffered Handy Solomon. And this was true.

The seaman's prophecy held good. Seven weeks

held us at that infernal job—seven weeks of solid, grinding work. The worst of it was, that we were kept at it so breathlessly, as though our very existence were to depend on the headlong rush of our labour. And then we had fully half the stores to put away again, and the other half to transport painfully over the neck of land from the cove to the beach.

So accustomed had I become to the routine in which we were involved, so habituated to anticipating the coming day as exactly like the day that had gone, that the completion of our job caught me quite by surprise. I had thrown myself down by the fire prepared for the some old half hour of drowsy nicotine, to be followed by the accustomed heavy sleep, and the usual early rising to toil. The evening was warm; I half closed my eyes.

Handy Solomon was coming in last. Instead of dropping to his place, he straddled the fire, stretching his arms over his head. He let them fall with a sharp exhalation.

“ ‘Lay aloft, lay aloft,’ the jolly bos’n cried.

Blow high, blow low, what care we!

‘Look ahead, look astern, look a-windward, look a-lee.’

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e.”

The effect was electrical. We all sprang to our feet and fell to talking at once.

“By God, we’re *through!*” cried Pulz. “I’d clean forgot it!”

The Nigger piled on more wood. We drew closer about the fire. All the interests in life, so long held in the background, leaped forward, eager for recognition. We spoke of trivialities almost for the first time since our landing, fused into a temporary but complete good fellowship by the relief.

"Wonder how the old doctor is getting on?" ventured Thrackles, after a while.

"The devil's a preacher! I wonder?" cried Handy Solomon.

"Let's make 'em a call," suggested Pulz.

"Don't believe they'd appreciate the compliment," I laughed. "Better let them make first call: they're the longer established." This was lost on them, of course. But we all felt kindly to one another that evening.

I carried the glow of it with me over until next morning, and was therefore somewhat dashed to meet Captain Selover, with clouded brows and an uncertain manner. He quite ignored my greeting.

"By God, Eagen," he squeaked, "can you think of anything more to be done?"

I straightened my back and laughed.

"Haven't you worked us hard enough?" I inquired. "Unless you gild the cabins, I don't see what else there can be to do."

Captain Selover stared me over.

"And you a naval man!" he marvelled. "Don't you see that the only thing that keeps this crew from gettin' restless is keeping them busy? I've sweat a damn sight more with my brain than you have with your back thinking up things to do. I can't see any-

thing ahead, and then we'll have hell to pay. Oh, they're a sweet lot!"

I whistled and my crest fell. Here was a new point of view; and also a new Captain Ezra. Where was the confidence in the might of his two hands?

He seemed to read my thoughts, and went on.

"I don't feel *sure* here on this cussed land. It ain't like a deck where a man has some show. They can scatter. They can hide. It ain't right to put a man ashore alone with such a crew. I'm doing my best, but it ain't goin' to be good enough. I wisht we were safe in 'Frisco harbour——"

He would have maundered on, but I seized his arm and led him out of possible hearing of the men.

"Here, buck up!" I said to him sternly. "There's nothing to be scared of. If it comes to a row, there's three of us and we've got guns. We could even sail the schooner at a pinch, and leave them here. You've stood them off before."

"Not ashore," protested Captain Selover weakly.

"Well, they don't know that. For God's sake don't let them see you've lost your nerve this way." He did not even wince at the accusation. "Put up a front."

He shook his head. The sand had completely run out of him. Yet I am convinced that if he could have felt the heave and roll of the deck beneath him, he would have faced three times the difficulties he now feared. However, I could see readily enough the wisdom of keeping the men at work.

"You can wreck the *Golden Horn*," I suggested. "I don't know whether there's anything left worth salvage; but it'll be something to do."

He clapped me on the shoulder.

"Good!" he cried, "I never thought of it."

"Another thing," said I, "you better give them a day off a week. That can't hurt them and it'll waste just that much more time."

"All right," agreed Captain Selover.

"Another thing yet. You know I'm not lazy, so it ain't that I'm trying to dodge work. But you'd better lay me off. It'll be so much more for the others."

"That's true," said he.

I could not recognise the man for what I knew him to be. He groped, as one in the dark, or as a sea animal taken out of its element and placed on the sands. Courage had given place to fear; decision to wavering; and singleness of purpose to a divided counsel. He who had so thoroughly dominated the entire ship, eagerly accepted advice of me—a man without experience.

That evening I sat apart considerably disturbed. I felt that the ground had dropped away beneath my feet. To be sure, everything was tranquil at present; but now I understood the source of that tranquillity and how soon it must fail. With opportunity would come more scheming, more speculation, more cupidity. How was I to meet it, with none to back me but a scared man, an absorbed man, and an indifferent man?

VIII

WRECKING OF THE *GOLDEN HORN*

PERCY DARROW, unexpected, made his first visit to us the very next evening. He sauntered in with a Mexican corn-husk cigarette between his lips, carrying a lantern; blew the light out, and sat down with a careless greeting, as though he had seen us only the day before.

"Hullo, boys," said he, "been busy?"

"How are ye, sir?" replied Handy Solomon. "Good Lord, mates, look at that!"

Our eyes followed the direction of his forefinger. Against the dark blue of the evening sky to northward glowed a faint phosphorescence, arch-shaped, from which shot, with pulsating regularity, long shafts of light. They beat almost to the zenith, and back again, a half dozen times, then the whole illumination disappeared with the suddenness of gas turned out.

"Now I wonder what that might be!" marvelled Thrackles.

"Northern lights," hazarded Pulz. "I've seen them almost like that in the Behring Seas."

"Northern lights your eye!" sneered Handy Solomon. "You may have seen them in the Behring Seas, but never this far south, and in August, and you can kiss the Book on that."

"What do you think, sir?" Thrackles inquired of the assistant.

"Devil's fire," replied Percy Darrow briefly. "The island's a little queer. I've noticed it before."

"Debbil fire," repeated the Nigger.

Darrow turned directly to him.

"Yes, devil's fire; and devils, too, for all I know; and certainly vampires. Did you ever hear of vampires, Doctor?"

"No," growled the Nigger.

"Well, they are women, wonderful, beautiful women. A man on a long voyage would just smack his lips to see them. They have shiny grey eyes, and lips red as raspberries. When you meet them they will talk with you and go home with you. And then when you're asleep they tear a little hole in your neck with their sharp claws, and they suck the blood with their red lips. When they aren't women, they take the shape of big bats like birds." He turned to me with so beautifully casual an air that I wanted to clap him on the back with the joy of it.

"By the way, Eagen, have you noticed those big bats the last few evenings, over by the cliff? *I* can't make out in the dusk whether they are vampires or just plain bats." He directed his remarks again to the Nigger. "Next time you see any of those big bats, Doctor, just you notice close. If they have just plain, black eyes, they're all right; but if they have grey eyes, with red rims around 'em, they're vampires. I wish you'd let me know, if you do find out. It's interesting."

"Don' get me near no bats," growled the Nigger.

"Where's Selover?" inquired Darrow.

"He stays aboard," I hastened to say. "Wants to keep an eye on the ship."

"That's laudable. What have you been doing?"

"We've been cleaning ship. Just finished yesterday evening."

"What next?"

"We were thinking of wrecking the *Golden Horn*."

"Quite right. Well, if you want any help with your engines or anything of the sort, call on me."

He arose and began to light his lantern.

"I hope as how you're getting on well there above, sir?" ventured Handy Solomon insinuatingly.

"Very well, I thank you, my man," replied Percy Darrow drily. "Remember those vampires, Doctor."

He swung the lantern and departed without further speech. We followed the spark of it until it disappeared in the arroyo.

Behind us bellowed the sea; over against us in the sky was the dull threatening glow of the volcano; about us were mysterious noises of crying birds, barking seals, rustling or rushing winds. I felt the thronging ghosts of all the old world's superstition swirling madly behind us in the eddies that twisted the smoke of our fire.

We wrecked the *Golden Horn*. Forward was a rusted-out donkey engine, which we took to pieces and put together again. It was no mean job, for all the running parts had to be cleaned smooth, and with the exception of a rudimentary knowledge on the part of Pulz and Perdosa, we were ignorant. In fact we should not have succeeded at all had it not been

for Percy Darrow and his lantern. The first evening we took him over to the cliff's edge he laughed aloud.

"Jove, boys, how could you guess it *all* wrong," he wondered.

With a few brief words he set us right, Pulz, Perdosa, and I listening intently; the others indifferent in the hopelessness of being able to comprehend. Of course, we went wrong again in our next day's experiments; but Darrow was down two or three times a week, and gradually we edged toward a practical result.

His explanations consumed but a few moments. After they were finished, we adjourned to the fire.

Thus we came gradually to a better acquaintance with the doctor's assistant. In many respects he remained always a puzzle to me. Certainly the men never knew how to take him. He was evidently not only unafraid of them, but genuinely indifferent to them.

Yet he displayed a certain interest in their needs and affairs. His practical knowledge was enormous. I think I have told you of the completeness of his arrangements—everything had been foreseen from grindstones to gas nippers. The same quality of concrete speculation showed him what we lacked in our own lives.

There was, as you remember, the matter of Handy Solomon's steel claw. He showed Thrackles a kind of lanyard knot that deep-sea person had never used. He taught Captain Selover how to make soft soap out of one species of seaweed. Me, he ini-

tiated in the art of fishing with a white bone lure. Our camp itself he reconstructed on scientific lines so that we enjoyed less aromatic smoke and more palatable dinner. And all of it he did amusedly, as though his ideas were almost too obvious to need communication.

We became in a manner intimate with him. He guyed the men in his indolent fashion, playing on their credulity, their good nature, even their forbearance. They alternately grinned and scowled. He left always a confused impression, so that no one really knew whether he cherished rancour against Percy Darrow or kindly feeling.

The Nigger was Darrow's especial prey. The assistant had early discovered that the cook was given to signs, omens, and superstitions.

From a curious scholar's lore he drew fantasies with which to torment his victim. We heard of all the witches, warlocks, incubi, succubi, harpies, devils, imps, and hauntings of Avitchi, from all the teachings of history, sacred and profane, Hindu, Egyptian, Greek, mediæval, Swedenborg, Rosicrucian, theosophy, theology, with every last ounce of horror, mystery, shivers, and creeps squeezed out of them. They were gorgeous ghost stories, for they were told by a man fully informed as to all the legendary and gruesome details. At first I used to think he might have communicated it more effectively. Then I saw that the cool, drawling manner, the level voice, were in reality the highest art.

He told his stories in a half-amused, detached manner which imposed confidence more readily than any

amount of earnest asseveration. The mere fact of his own belief in what he said came to matter little. He was the vehicle by which was brought accurate knowledge. He had read all these things, and now reported them as he had read: each man could decide for himself as to their credibility.

At last the donkey engine was cleared and reinstalled, atop the cliff. The Nigger built under her a fire of black walnut; Captain Selover handed out grog all around; and we started her up with a cheer, just to see the wheels revolve.

Next we half buried some long hatches, end up, to serve as bitts for the lines, hitched our cables to them, and joyfully commenced the task of pulling the *Golden Horn* piece by piece up the side of the cliff.

The stores were badly damaged by the wet, and there was no liquor, for which I was sincerely grateful. We broke into the boxes, and arrayed ourselves in various garments—which speedily fell to pieces—and appropriated gim-cracks of all sorts. There were some arms, but the ammunition had gone bad. Perdosa, out of forty or fifty mis-fires, got one feeble sputter, and a tremendous *bang* which blew up his piece, leaving only the stock in his hand. A few tinned goods were edible; but all the rest was destroyed. A lot of hard woods, a thousand feet of chain cable, and a fairly good anchor might be considered as prizes. As for the rest, it was foolishness, but we hauled it up just the same until nothing at all remained. Then we shut off the donkey engine, and put on dry clothes. We had been quite happy for the eight months.

It was now well along toward spring. The winter had been like summer, and with the exception of a few rains of a week or so, we had enjoyed beautiful skies. The seals had thinned out considerably, but were now returning in vast numbers ready for their annual domestic arrangements.

Our Sundays we had mostly spent in resting, or in fishing. There were many deep sea fish to be had, of great palatability, but small gameness; they came like so many leaden weights. A few of us had climbed some of the hills in a half-hearted curiosity, but from their summits saw nothing to tempt weariness. Practically we knew nothing beyond the mile or so of beach on which we lived.

Captain Selover had made a habit of coming ashore at least once during the day. He had contented himself with standing aloof, but I took pains to seem to confer with him, so that the men might suppose that I, as mate, was engaged in carrying out his directions. The dread of him was my most potent influence over them.

During the last few days of our wrecking, Captain Selover had omitted his daily visit. The fact made me uneasy, so that at my first opportunity I sculled myself out to the schooner. I found him, moist-eyed as usual, leaning against the mainmast doing nothing.

"We've finished, sir," said I.

He looked at me.

"Will you come ashore and have a look, sir?" I inquired.

"I ain't going ashore again," he muttered thickly.

"What!" I cried.

"I ain't going ashore again," he repeated obstinately, "and that's all there is to it. It's too much of a strain on any man. Suit yourself. You run them. I shipped as captain of a vessel. I'm no dock walloper. I won't *do* it—for no man!"

I gasped with dismay at the man's complete moral collapse. It seemed incredible. I caught myself wondering whether he would recover tone were he again to put to sea.

"My God, man, but you *must*!" I cried at last.

"I won't, and that's flat," said he, and turned deliberately on his heel and disappeared in the cabin.

I went ashore thoughtful and a little scared. But on reflection I regained a great part of my ease of mind. You see, I had been with these men now eight months, during which they had been as orderly as so many primary schoolboys. They had worked hard, without grumbling, and had even approached a sort of friendliness about the camp fire. My first impression was overlaid. As I looked back on the voyage, with what I took to be a clearer vision, I could not but admit that the incidents were in themselves trivial enough—a natural excitement by a superstitious negro, a little tall talk that meant nothing. It must have been the glamour of the adventure that had deceived me; that, and the unusual stage setting and costuming. Certainly few men would work hard for eight months without a murmur, without a chance to look about them.

In that, of course, I was deceived by my inexperi-

ence. I realised later the wonderful effect Captain Selover threw away with his empty brandy bottles. The crew might grumble and plot during the watch below; but when Captain Ezra Selover said *work*, they worked. He had been saying work, for eight months. They had, from force of experience, obeyed him. It was all very simple.

IX

THE EMPTY BRANDY BOTTLE

So there I was at once deprived of my chief support. Although no danger seemed imminent, nevertheless the necessity of acting on my own initiative and responsibility oppressed me somewhat.

Truth to tell, after the first, I was more relieved than dismayed at the captain's resolution to stay aboard. His drinking habit was growing on him, and afloat or ashore he was now little more than a figurehead, so that my chief asset as far as he was concerned, was rather his reputation than his direct influence. In contact with the men, I dreaded lest sooner or later he do something to lessen or destroy the awe in which they held him.

Of course Dr. Schermerhorn had been mistaken in his man: A real captain of men would have risen to circumstances wherever he found them. But who could have foretold? Captain Selover had been a rascal always, but a successful and courageous rascal. He had run desperate chances, dominated desperate crews. Who could know that a crumble of island beach and six months ashore would turn him into what he had become? Yet I believe such cases are not uncommon in other walks of life. A man and his work combine to mean something; yet both may be absolutely useless when separated. It was the weak link——

I put in some time praying earnestly that the eyes

of the crew might be blinded, and that the doctor would finish his experiments before the cauldron could boil up again.

My first act as real commander was to announce holiday. My idea was that the island would keep the men busy for a while. Then I would assign them more work to do. They proposed at once a tour into the interior.

We started up the west coast. After three or four miles along a mesa formation where often we had to circle long detours to avoid the gullies, we came upon another short beach, and beyond it a series of ledges on which basked several hundred seals. They did not seem alarmed. In fact one old bull, scarred by many battles, made toward us.

We left him, scaled the cliff, and turned up a broad, pleasant valley toward the interior.

There the later lava flow had been deflected. All that showed of the original eruption were occasional red outcropping rocks. Soil and grass had overlaid the mineral. Scattered trees were planted throughout the flat. Cacti and semi-tropical bushes mingled with brush on the rounded side hills. A number of brilliant birds fluttered at our approach.

Suddenly Handy Solomon, who was in advance, stopped and pointed to the crest of the hill. A file of animals moved along the sky line.

"Mutton!" said he, "or the devil's a preacher!"

"Sheep!" cried Thrackles. "Where did they come from?"

"*Golden Horn*," I suggested. "Remember that wide, empty deck forward? They carried sheep there."

The men separated, intending fresh meat. The af-

fair was ridiculous. These sheep had become as wild as deer. Our surrounding party with its silly bared knives could only look after them open-mouthed, as they skipped nimbly between its members.

"Get a gun of the Old Man, Mr. Eagen," suggested Pulz, "and we'll have something besides salt horse and fish."

I nodded.

We continued. The island was like this as far as we went. When we climbed a ridge, we found ourselves looking down on a spider-web of other valleys and cañons of the same nature, all diverging to broad downs and a jump into the sea, all converging to the outworks that guarded the volcano with its canopy of vapour.

On our way home we cut across the higher country and the heads of the cañons until we found ourselves looking down on the valley and Dr. Schermerhorn's camp. The steam from the volcanic blowholes swayed below us. Through its rifts we saw the tops of the buildings. Presently we made out Percy Darrow, dressed in overalls, his sleeves rolled back, and carrying a retort. He walked, very preoccupied, to one of the miniature craters, where he knelt and went through some operation indistinguishable at the distance. I looked around to see my companions staring at him fascinated, their necks craned out, their bodies drawn back into hiding. In a moment he had finished, and carried the retort carefully into the laboratory. The men sighed and stood erect, once more themselves. As we turned away Perdosa voiced what must have been in the minds of all.

"A man could climb down there," said he.

"Why should he want to?" I demanded sharply.

"*Quien sabe?*" shrugged he.

We turned in silence toward the beach. Each brooded his thoughts. The sight of that man dressed in overalls, carrying on some mysterious business, brought home to each of us the fact that our expedition had an object, as yet unknown to us. The thought had of late dropped into the background. For my part I had been so immersed in the adventure and the labour and the insistent need of the hour that I had forgotten why I had come. Dr. Schermerhorn's purpose was as inscrutable to me as at first. What had I accomplished?

The men, too, seemed struck with some such idea. There were no yarns about the camp fire that night. Percy Darrow did not appear, for which I was sincerely sorry. His presence might have created a diversion. For some unknown reason all my old apprehensions, my sense of impending disaster, had returned to me strengthened. In the firelight the Nigger's sullen face looked sinister, Pulz's nervous white countenance looked vicious. Thrackles' heavy, bulldog expression was threatening, Perdosa's Mexican cast fit for knife work in the back. And Handy Solomon, stretched out, leaning on his elbow, with his red headgear, his snaky hair, his hook nose, his restless eye and his glittering steel claw—the glow wrote across his aura the names of Kid, Morgan, Blackbeard.

They sat smoking, staring into the fire with mesmerised eyes. The silence got on my nerves. I arose impatiently and walked down the pale beach, where



“These sheep had become as wild as deer”

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the stars glimmered in splashes along the wettest sands. The black silhouette of the hills against the dark blue of the night sky; the white of breakers athwart the indistinct heave of the ocean, a faint light marking the position of the *Laughing Lass*—that was everything in the world. I made out some object rolled about in the edge of the wash. At the cost of wet feet I rescued it. It was an empty brandy bottle.

X

CHANGE OF MASTERS

THE next day we continued our explorations by land, and so for a week after that. I thought it best not to relinquish all authority, so I organised regular expeditions, and ordered their direction. The men did not object. It was all good enough fun to them.

The net results were that we found a nesting place of sea birds—too late in the season for eggs; a hot spring near enough camp to be useful; and that was about all. The sheep were the only animals on the island, although there were several sorts of birds. In general, the country was as I have described it—either volcanic or overlaid with fertile earth. In any case it was cañon and hill. We soon grew tired of climbing and turned our attention to the sea.

With the surf boat we skirted the coast. It was impregnable except in three places: our own beach, that near the seal rookery, and on the south side of the island. We landed at each one of these places. But returning close to the coast we happened upon a cave mouth more or less guarded by an outlying rock.

The day was calm, so we ventured in. At first I thought it merely a gorge in the rock, but even while peering for the end wall we slipped under the archway and found ourselves in a vast room.

Our eyes were dazzled so we could make out little

at first. But through the still, clear water the light filtered freely from below, showing the bottom as through a sea glass. We saw the fish near the entrance, and coral and sea growths of marvellous vividness. They waved slowly as in a draught of air. The medium in which they floated was absolutely invisible, for, of course, there were no reflections from its surface. We seemed to be suspended in mid-air, and only when the dipping oars made rings could we realise that anything sustained us.

Suddenly the place let loose in pandemonium. The most fiendish cries, groans, shrieks, broke out, confusing themselves so thoroughly with their own echoes that the volume of sound was continuous. Heavy splashes shook the water. The boat rocked. The invisible surface was broken into facets.

We shrank, terrified. From all about us glowed hundreds of eyes like coals of fire—on a level with us, above us, almost over our heads. Two by two the coals were extinguished.

Below us the bottom was clouded with black figures, darting rapidly like a school of minnows beneath a boat. They darkened the coral and the sands and the glistening sea growths just as a cloud temporarily darkens the landscape—only the occultations and brightenings succeeded each other much more swiftly.

We stared stupefied, our thinking power blurred by the incessant whirl of motion and noise.

Suddenly Thrackles laughed aloud.

"Seals!" he shouted through his trumpeted hands.

Our eyes were expanding to the twilight. We could make out the arch of the room, its shelves, and hol-

lows, and niches. Lying on them we could discern the seals, hundreds and hundreds of them, all staring at us, all barking and bellowing. As we approached, they scrambled from their elevations, and, diving to the bottom, scurried to the entrance of the cave.

We lay on our oars for ten minutes. Then silence fell. There persisted a tiny *drip, drip, drip* from some point in the darkness. It merely accentuated the hush. Suddenly from far in the interior of the hill there came a long, hollow *boo-o-o-m!* It reverberated, roaring. The surge that had lifted our boat some minutes before thus reached its journey's end.

The chamber was very lofty. As we rowed cautiously in, it lost nothing of its height, but something in width. It was marvellously coloured, like all the volcanic rocks of this island. In addition some chemical drip had thrown across its vividness long gauzy streamers of white. We rowed in as far as the faintest daylight lasted us. The occasional reverberating *boom* of the surges seemed as distant as ever.

This was beyond the seal rookery on the beach. Below it we entered an open cleft of some size to another squarer cave. It was now high tide; the water extended a scant ten fathoms to end on an interior shale beach. The cave was a perfectly straight passage following the line of the cleft. How far in it reached we could not determine, for it, too, was full of seals, and after we had driven them back a hundred feet or so their fiery eyes scared us out. We did not care to put them at bay.

The next day I rowed out to the *Laughing Lass* and got a rifle. I found the captain asleep in his bunk, and

did not disturb him. Perdosa and I, with infinite pains, tracked and stalked the sheep, of which I killed one. We found the mutton excellent. The hunting was difficult, and the quarry, as time went on, more and more suspicious, but henceforward we did not lack for fresh meat. Furthermore we soon discovered that fine trolling was to be had outside the reef. We rigged a sail for the extra dory, and spent much of our time at the sport. I do not know the names of the fish. They were very gamy indeed, and ran from five to an indeterminate number of pounds in weight. Above fifty pounds our light tackle parted, so we had no means of knowing how large they may have been.

Thus we spent very pleasantly the greater part of two weeks. At the end of that time I made up my mind that it would be just as well to get back to business. Accordingly I called Perdosa and directed him to sort and clear of rust the salvaged chain cable. He refused flatly. I took a step toward him. He drew his knife and backed away.

"Perdosa," said I firmly, "put up that knife."

"No," said he.

I pulled the saw-barrelled Colt's 45 and raised it slowly to a level with his breast.

"Perdosa," I repeated, "drop that knife."

The crisis had come, but my resolution was fully prepared for it. I should not have cared greatly if I had had to shoot the man—as I certainly should have done had he disobeyed. There would then have been one less to deal with in the final accounting, which strangely enough I now for a moment never doubted would come. I had not before aimed at a man's life,

so you can see to what tensivity the baffling mystery had strung me.

Perdosa hesitated a fraction of an instant. I really think he might have chanced it, but Handy Solomon, who had been watching me closely, growled at him.

"Drop it, you fool!" he said.

Perdosa let fall the knife.

"Now, get at that cable," I commanded, still at white heat. I stood over him until he was well at work, then turned back to set tasks for the other men. Handy Solomon met me halfway.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Eagen," said he, "I want a word with you."

"I have nothing to say to you," I snapped, still excited.

"It ain't reasonable not to hear a man's say," he advised in his most conciliatory manner, "I'm talking for all of us."

He paused a moment, took my silence for consent, and went ahead.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Eagen," said he, "we ain't going to do any more useless work. There ain't no laziness about us, but we ain't going to be busy at nothing. All the camp work and the haulin' and cuttin' and cleanin' and the rest of it, we'll do gladly. But we ain't goin' to pound any more cable, and you can kiss the Book on that."

"You mean to mutiny?" I asked.

He made a deprecatory gesture.

"Put us aboard ship, sir, and let us hear the Old Man give his orders, and you'll find no mutiny in us.

But here ashore it's different. Did the Old Man give orders to pound the cable?"

"I represent the captain," I stammered.

He caught the evasion. "I thought so. Well, if you got any kick on us, please, sir, go get the Old Man. If he says to our face, pound cable, why pound cable it is. Ain't that right, boys?"

They murmured something. Perdosa deliberately dropped his hammer and joined the group. My hand strayed again toward the sawed-off Colt's 45.

"I wouldn't do that," said Handy Solomon, almost kindly. "You couldn't kill us all. And w'at good would it do? I asks you that. I can cut down a chicken with my knife at twenty feet. You must surely see, sir, that I could have killed you too easy while you were covering Pancho there. This ain't got to be a war, Mr. Eagen, just because we don't want to work without any sense to it."

There was more of the same sort. I had plenty of time to see my dilemma. Either I would have to abandon my attempt to keep the men busy, or I would have to invoke the authority of Captain Selover. To do the latter would be to destroy it. The master had become a stuffed figure, a bogie with which to frighten, an empty bladder that a prick would collapse. With what grace I could muster, I had to give in.

"You'll have to have it your own way, I suppose," I snapped.

Thrackles grinned, and Pulz started to say something, but Handy Solomon, with a peremptory gesture, and a black scowl, stopped him short.

"Now that's what I calls right proper and hand-

some!" he cried admiringly. "We reely had no right to expect that, boys, as seamen, from our first officer! You can kiss the Book on it, that very few crews have such kind masters. Mr. Eagen has the right, and we signed to it all straight, to work us as he pleases; and w'at does he do? Why, he up and gives us a week shore leave, and then he gives us light watches, and all the time our pay goes on just the same. Now that's w'at I calls right proper and handsome conduct, or the devil's a preacher, and I ventures with all respect to propose three cheers for Mr. Eagen."

They gave them, grinning broadly. The villain stood looking at me, a sardonic gleam in the back of his eye. Then he gave a little hitch to his red head covering, and sauntered away humming between his teeth. I stood watching him, choked with rage and indecision. The humming broke into words.

"'Oh, quarter, oh, quarter!' the jolly pirates cried.

Blow high, blow low! What care we?

But the quarter that we gave them was to sink them
in the sea,

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e."

"Here, you swab," he cried to Thrackles, "and you, Pancho! get some wood, lively! And Pulz, bring us a pail of water. Doctor, let's have duff to celebrate on."

The men fell to work with alacrity.

IX

THE CORROSIVE

THAT evening I smoked in a splendid isolation while the men whispered apart. I had nothing to do but smoke, and to chew my cud, which was bitter. There could be no doubt, however I may have saved my face, that command had been taken from me by that rascal, Handy Solomon. I was in two minds as to whether or not I should attempt to warn Darrow or the doctor. Yet what could I say? and against whom should I warn them? The men had grumbled, as men always do grumble in idleness, and had perhaps talked a little wildly; but that was nothing.

The only indisputable fact I could adduce was that I had allowed my authority to slip through my fingers. And adequately to excuse that, I should have to confess that I was a writer and no handler of men.

I abandoned the unpleasant train of thought with a snort of disgust, but it had led me to another. In the joy and uncertainty of living I had practically lost sight of the reason for my coming. With me it had always been more the adventure than the story; my writing was a by-product, a utilisation of what life offered me. I had set sail possessed by the sole idea of ferreting out Dr. Schermerhorn's investigations, but the gradual development of affairs had ended by absorbing my every faculty. Now, cast into an eddy by my change of fortunes, the original idea

regained its force. I was out of the active government of affairs, with leisure on my hands, and my thoughts naturally turned with curiosity again to the laboratory in the valley.

Darrow's "devil fires" were again painting the sky. I had noticed them from time to time, always with increasing wonder. The men accepted them easily as only one of the unexplained phenomena of a sailor's experience, but I had not as yet hit on a hypothesis that suited me. They were not allied to the aurora; they differed radically from the ordinary volcanic emanations; and scarcely resembled any electrical displays I had ever seen. The night was cool; the stars bright: I resolved to investigate.

Without further delay I arose to my feet and set off into the darkness. Immediately one of the group detached himself from the fire and joined me.

"Going for a little walk, sir?" asked Handy Solomon sweetly. "That's quite right and proper. Nothin' like a little walk to get you fit and right for your bunk."

He held close to my elbow. We got just as far as the stockade in the bed of the arroyo. The lights we could make out now across the zenith; but owing to the precipitance of the cliffs, and the rise of the arroyo bed, it was impossible to see more. Handy Solomon felt the defences carefully.

"A man would think, sir, it was a cannibal island," he observed. "All so tight and tidy-like here. It would take a ship's guns to batter her down. A man might dig under these here two gate logs, if no one was against him. Like to try it, sir?"

"No," I answered gruffly.

From that time on I was virtually a prisoner; yet so carefully was my surveillance accomplished that I could place my finger on nothing definite. Someone always accompanied me on my walks; and in the evening I was herded as closely as any cattle.

Handy Solomon took the direction of affairs off my hands. You may be sure he set no very heavy tasks. The men cut a little wood, carried up a few pails of water—that was all.

Lacking incentive to stir about, they came to spend most of their time lying on their backs watching the sky. This in turn bred a languor which is the sickest, most soul- and temper-destroying affair invented by the devil. They could not muster up energy enough to walk down the beach and back, and yet they were wearied to death of the inaction. After a little they became irritable toward one another. Each suspected the other of doing less than he should. You who know men will realise what this meant.

The atmosphere of our camp became surly. I recognised the precursor of its becoming dangerous. One day on a walk in the hills I came on Thrackles and Pulz lying on their stomachs gazing down fixedly at Dr. Schermerhorn's camp. This was nothing extraordinary, but they started guiltily to their feet when they saw me, and made off, growling under their breaths.

All this that I have told you so briefly, took time. It was the eating through of men's spirits by that worst of corrosives, idleness. I conceive it unnecessary to weary you with the details——

The situation was as yet uneasy but not alarming. One evening I overheard the beginning of an absurd plot to gain entrance to the Valley—that was as far as detail went. I became convinced at last that I should in some way warn Percy Darrow.

That seems a simple enough proposition, does it not? But if you will stop to think one moment of the difficulties of my position, you will see that it was not as easy as at first it appears. Darrow still visited us in the evening. The men never allowed me even the chance of private communication while he was with us. One or two took pains to stretch out between us. Twice I arose when the assistant did, resolved to accompany him part way back. Both times men resolutely escorted us, and as resolutely separated us from the opportunity of a single word apart. The crew never threatened me by word or look. But we understood each other.

I was not permitted to row out to the *Laughing Lass* without escort. Therefore I never attempted to visit her again. The men were not anxious to do so; their awe of the captain made them only too glad to escape his notice. That empty shell of a past reputation was my only hope. It shielded the arms and ammunition.

As I look back on it now, the period seems to me to be one of merely potential trouble. The men had not taken the pains to crystallise their ideas. I really think their compelling emotion was that of curiosity. They wanted to *see*. It needed a definite impulse to change that desire to one of greed.

The impulse came from Percy Darrow and his idle

talk of voodooos. As usual he was directing his remarks to the sullen Nigger.

"Voodooos?" he said. "Of course there are. Don't fool yourself for a minute on that. There are good ones and bad ones. You can tame them if you know how, and they will do anything you want them to." Pulz chuckled in his throat. "You don't believe it?" drawled the assistant turning to him. "Well, it's so. You know that heavy box we are so careful of? Well, that's got a tame voodoo in it."

The others laughed.

"What he like?" asked the Nigger gravely.

"He's a fine voodoo, with wavery arms and green eyes, and red glows." Watching narrowly its effect he swung off into one of the genuine old crooning voodoo songs, once so common down South, now so rarely heard. No one knows what the words mean—they are generally held to be charm-words only—a magic gibberish. But the Nigger sprang across the fire like lightning, his face altered by terror, to seize Darrow by the shoulders.

"Doan you! Doan you!" he gasped, shaking the assistant violently back and forth. "Dat he King Voodoo song! Dat call him all de voodoo—all!"

He stared wildly about in the darkness as though expecting to see the night thronged. There was a moment of confusion. Eager for any chance I hissed under my breath; "Danger! Look out!"

I could not tell whether or not Darrow heard me. He left soon after. The mention of the chest had focussed the men's interest.

"Well," Pulz began, "we've been here on this spot o' hell for a long time."

"A year and five months," reckoned Thrackles.

"A man can do a lot in that time."

"If he's busy."

"They've been busy."

"Yes."

"Wonder what they've done?"

There was no answer to this, and the sea lawyer took a new tack.

"I suppose we're all getting double wages."

"That's so."

"And that's say four hunder' for us and Mr. Eagen here. I suppose the Old Man don't let the schooner go for nothing."

"Two hundred and fifty a month," said I, and then would have had the words back.

They cried out in prolonged astonishment.

"Seventeen months," pursued the logician after a few moments. He scratched with a stub of lead. "That makes over eleven thousand dollars since we've been out. How much do you suppose his outfit stands him?" he appealed to me.

"I'm sure I can't tell you," I replied shortly.

"Well, it's a pile of money, anyway."

Nobody said anything for some time.

"Wonder what they've done?" Pulz asked again.

"Something that pays big." Thrackles supplied the desired answer.

"Dat chis'——" suggested Perdosa.

"Voodoo——" muttered the Nigger.

"That's to scare us out," said Handy Solomon,

with vast contempt. "That's what makes me sure it is the chest."

Pulz muttered some of the jargon of alchemy.

"That's it," approved Handy Solomon. "If we could get——"

"We wouldn't know how to use it," interrupted Pulz.

"The book——" said Thrackles.

"Well, the book——" asserted Pulz pugnaciously.

"How do you know what it will be? It may be the Philosopher's Stone and it may be one of these other damn things. And then where'd we be?"

It was astounding to hear this nonsense bandied about so seriously. And yet they more than half believed, for they were deep-sea men of the old school, and this was in print. Thrackles voiced approximately the general attitude.

"Philosopher's stone or not, something's up. The old boy took too good care of that box, and he's spending too much money, and he's got hold of too much hell afloat to be doing it for his health."

"You know w'at I t'ink?" smiled Perdosa. "He mak' di'mon's. He *say* dat."

The Nigger had entered one of his black, brooding moods from which these men expected oracles.

"Get him ches'," he muttered. "I see him full—full of di'mon's!"

They listened to him with vast respect, and were visibly impressed. So deep was the sense of awe that Handy Solomon unbent enough to whisper to me:

"I don't take any stock in the Nigger's talk *ordinarily*. He's a hell of a fool nigger. But when his eye

looks like that, then you want to listen close. He sees things then. Lots of times he's seen things. Even last year—the *Oyama*—he told about her three days ahead. That's why we were so ready for her," he chuckled.

Nothing more developed for a long time except a savage fight between Pulz and Perdosa. I hunted sheep, fished, wandered about—always with an escort tired to death before he started. The thought came to me to kill this man and so to escape and make cause with the scientists. My common sense forbade me. I begin to think that common sense is a very foolish faculty indeed.

It taught me the obvious—that all this idle, vapouring talk was common enough among men of this class, so common that it would hardly justify a murder, would hardly explain an unwarranted intrusion on those who employed me. How would it look for me to go to them with these words in my mouth:

"The captain has taken to drinking to dull the monotony. The crew think you are an alchemist and are making diamonds. Their interest in this fact seemed to me excessive, so I killed one of them, and here I am."

"And who are you?" they could ask.

"I am a reporter," would be my only truthful reply.

You can see the false difficulties of my position. I do not defend my attitude. Undoubtedly a born leader of men, like Captain Selover at his best, would have known how to act with the proper decision both now and in the inception of the first mutiny. At heart I never doubted the reality of the crisis.

Even Percy Darrow saw the surliness of the men's attitudes, and with his usual good sense divined the cause.

"You chaps are getting lazy," said he, "why don't you do something? Where's the captain?"

They growled something about there being nothing to do, and explained that the captain preferred to live aboard.

"Don't blame him," said Darrow, "but he might give us a little of his squeaky company occasionally. Boys, I'll tell you something about seals. The old bull seals have long, stiff whiskers—a foot long. Do you know there's a market for those whiskers? Well, there is. The Chinese mount them in gold and use them for cleaners for their long pipes. Each whisker is worth from six bits to a dollar and a quarter. Why don't you kill a few bull seal for the 'trimmings'?"

"Nothin' to do with a voodoo?" grunted Handy Solomon.

Darrow laughed amusedly. "No, this is the truth," he assured. "I'll tell you what: I'll give you boys six bits apiece for the whisker hairs, and four bits for the galls. I expect to sell them at a profit."

Next morning they shook off their lethargy and went seal-hunting.

I was practically commanded to attend. This attitude had been growing of late: now it began to take a definite form.

"Mr. Eagan, don't you want to go hunting?" or "Mr. Eagen, I guess I'll just go along with you to stretch my legs," had given way to, "We're going fishing: you'd better come along."

I had known for a long time that I had lost any real control of them; and that perhaps humiliated me a little. However, my inexperience at handling such men, and the anomalous character of my position to some extent consoled me. In the filaments brushed across the face of my understanding I could discover none so strong as to support an overt act on my part. I cannot doubt, that had the affair come to a focus, I should have warned the scientists even at the risk of my life. In fact, as I shall have occasion to show you, I did my best. But at the moment, in all policy I could see my way to little besides acquiescence.

We killed seals by sequestering the bulls, surrounding them, and clubbing them at a certain point of the forehead. It was surprising to see how hard they fought, and how quickly they succumbed to a blow properly directed. Then we stripped the mask with its bristle of long whiskers, took the gall, and dragged the carcass into the surf where it was devoured by fish. At first the men, pleased by the novelty, stripped the skins. The blubber, often two or three inches in thickness, had then to be cut away from the pelt, cube by cube. It was a long, an oily, and odoriferous job. We stunk mightily of seal oil; our garments were shiny with it, the very pores of our skins seemed to ooze it. And even after the pelt was fairly well cleared, it had still to be tanned. Percy Darrow suggested the method, but the process was long, and generally unsatisfactory. With the acquisition of the fifth greasy, heavy, and ill-smelling piece of fur the men's interest in peltries waned. They confined themselves in all strictness to the "trimmings."

Percy Darrow showed us how to clean the whisks. The process was evil. The masks were, quite simply, to be advanced so far in the way of putrefaction that the bristles would part readily from their sockets. The first batch the men hung out on a line. A few moments later we heard a mighty squawking, and rushed out to find the island ravens making off with the entire catch. Protection of netting had to be rigged. We caught seals for a month or so. There was novelty in it, and it satisfied the lust for killing. As time went on, the bulls grew warier. Then we made expeditions to outlying rocks.

Later Handy Solomon approached me on another diplomatic errand.

"The seals is getting shy, sir," said he.

"They are," said I.

"The only way to do is to shoot them," said he.

"Quite like," I agreed.

A pause ensued.

"We've got no cartridges," he insinuated.

"And you've taken charge of my rifle," I pointed out.

"Oh, not a bit, sir," he cried. "Thrackles, he just took it to clean it—you can have it whenever you want it, sir."

"I have no cartridges—as you have observed," said I.

"There's plenty aboard," he suggested.

"And they're in very good hands there," said I.

He ruminated a moment, polishing the steel of his hook against the other arm of his shirt. Suddenly he looked up at me with a humorous twinkle.

"You're afraid of us!" he accused.

I was silent, not knowing just how to meet so direct an attack.

"No need to be," he continued.

I said nothing.

He looked at me shrewdly; then stood off on another tack.

"Well, sir, I didn't mean just that. I didn't mean you was really scared of us. But we're gettin' to know each other, livin' here on this old island, brothers-like. There ain't no officers and men ashore—is there, now, sir? When we gets back to the old *Laughing Lass*, then we drops back into our dooty again all right and proper. You can kiss the Book on that. Old Scrubs, he knows that. He don't want no shore in his. *He* knows enough to stay aboard, where we'd all rather be."

He stopped abruptly, spat, and looked at me. I wondered whither this devious diplomacy led us.

"Still, in one way, an officer's an officer, and a seaman's a seaman, thinks you, and discipline must be held up among mates ashore or afloat, thinks you. Quite proper, sir. And I can see you think that the arms is for the afterguard except in case of trouble. Quite proper. You can do the shooting, and you can keep the cartridges always by you. Just for discipline, sir."

The man's boldness in so fully arming me was astonishing, and his carelessness in allowing me aboard with Captain Selover astonished me still more. Nevertheless I promised to go for the desired cartridges, fully resolved to make an appeal.

A further consideration of the elements of the game convinced me, however, of the fellow's shrewdness. It was no more dangerous to allow me a rifle—under direct surveillance—for the purposes of hunting, than to leave me my sawed-off revolver, which I still retained. The arguments he had used against my shooting Perdosa were quite as cogent now. As to the second point, I, finding the sun unexpectedly strong, returned from the cove for my hat, and so overheard the following between Thrackles and his leader:

"What's to keep him from staying aboard?" cried Thrackles, protesting.

"Well, he might," acknowledged Handy Solomon, "and then are we the worse off? You ain't going to make a boat attack against Old Scrubs, are you?"

Thrackles hesitated.

"You can kiss the Book on it, you ain't," went on Handy Solomon easily, "nor me, nor Pulz, nor the Greaser, nor the Nigger, nor none of us all together. We've had our dose of that. Well, if he goes aboard and *stays*, where are we the worse off? I asks you that. But he won't. This is w'ats goin' to happen. Says he to Old Scrubs, 'Sir, the men needs you to bash in their heads.' 'Bash 'em in yourself,' says he, 'that's w'at you're for.' And if he should come ashore, w'at could he do? I asks you that. We ain't disobeyed no orders dooly delivered. We're ready to pull halliards at the word. No, let him go aboard, and if he peaches to the Old Man, why all the better, for it just gets the Old Man down on him."

"How about Old Scrubs——"

"Don't you believe none in luck?" asked Handy Solomon.

"Aye."

"Well, so do I, with w'at that law-crimp used to call joodicious assistance."

I rowed out to the *Laughing Lass* very thoughtful, and a little shaken by the plausible argument. Captain Selover was lying dead drunk across the cabin table. I did my best to waken him, but failed, took a score of cartridges—no more—and departed sadly. Nothing could be gained by staying aboard; every chance might be lost. Besides, an opening to escape in the direction of the laboratory might offer—I, as well as they, believed in luck judiciously assisted.

In the ensuing days I learned much of the habits of seals. We sneaked along the cliff tops until over the rookeries; then lay flat on our stomachs and peered cautiously down on our quarry. The seals had become very wary. A slight jar, the fall of a pebble, sometimes even sounds unnoticed by ourselves, were enough to send them into the water. There they lined up just outside the surf, their sleek heads glossy with the wet, their calm, soft eyes fixed unblinkingly on us.

It was useless to shoot them in the water: they sank at once.

When, however, we succeeded in gaining an advantageous position, it was necessary to shoot with extreme accuracy. A bullet directly through the back of the head would kill cleanly. A hit anywhere else was practically useless, for even in death the animals seemed to retain enough blind instinctive vitality to flop them into the water. There they were lost.

Each rookery consisted of one tremendous bull who officiated apparently as the standing army; a number of smaller bulls, his direct descendants; the cows, and the pups. The big bull held his position by force of arms. Occasionally other, unattached, bulls would come swimming by. On arriving opposite the rookery the stranger would utter a peculiar challenge. It was never refused by the resident champion, who promptly slid into the sea, and engaged battle. If he conquered, the stranger went on his way. If, however, the stranger won, the big bull immediately struck out to sea, abandoning his rookery, while the new-comer swam in and attempted to make his title good with all the younger bulls. I have seen some fierce combats out there in the blue water. They gashed each other deep——

You can see by this how our hunting was never at an end. On Tuesday we would kill the boss bull of a certain establishment. By Thursday, at latest, another would be installed.

I learned curious facts about seals in those days. The hunting did not appeal to me particularly, because it seemed to me useless to kill so large an animal for so small a spoil. Still, it was a means to my all-absorbing end, and I confess that the stalking, the lying belly down on the sun-warmed grass over the surge and under the clear sky, was extremely pleasant. While awaiting the return of the big bull often we had opportunity to watch the others at their daily affairs, and even the unresponsive Thrackles was struck with their almost human intelligence. Did you know that seals kiss each other, and weep tears when grieved?

The men often discussed among themselves the narrow, dry cave. There the animals were practically penned in. They agreed that a great killing could be made there, but the impossibility of distinguishing between the bulls and the cows deterred them. The cave was quite dark.

Immerced in our own affairs thus, the days, weeks, and months went by. Events had slipped beyond my control. I had embarked on a journalistic enterprise, and now that purpose was entirely out of my reach.

Up the valley Dr. Schermerhorn and his assistant were engaged in some experiment of whose very nature I was still ignorant. Also I was likely to remain so. The precautions taken against interference by the men were equally effective against me. As if that were not enough, any move of investigation on my part would be radically misinterpreted, and to my own danger, by the men. I might as well have been in London.

However, as to my first purpose in this adventure I had evolved another plan, and therefore was content. I made up my mind that on the voyage home, if nothing prevented, I would tell my story to Percy Darrow, and throw myself on his mercy. The results of the experiment would probably by then be ready for the public, and there was no reason, as far as I could see, why I should not get the "scoop" at first hand.

Certainly my sincerity would be without question; and I hoped that two years or more of service such as I had rendered would tickle Dr. Schermerhorn's sense of his own importance. So adequate did this plan seem, that I gave up thought on the subject.

My whole life now lay on the shores. I was not again permitted to board the *Laughing Lass*. Captain Selover I saw twice at a distance. Both times he seemed to be rather uncertain. The men did not remark it. The days went by. I relapsed into that state so well known to you all, when one seems caught in the meshes of a dream existence which has had no beginning and which is destined never to have an end.

We were to hunt seals, and fish, and pry bivalves from the rocks at low tide, and build fires, and talk, and alternate between suspicion and security, between the danger of sedition and the insanity of men without defined purpose, world without end forever.

XII

"OLD SCRUBS" COMES ASHORE

THE inevitable happened. One noon Pulz looked up from his labour of pulling the whiskers from the evil-smelling masks.

"How many of these damn things we got?" he inquired.

"About three hunder' and fifty," Thrackles replied.

"Well, we've got enough for me. I'm sick of this job. It stinks."

They looked at each other. I could see the disgust rising in their eyes, the reek of rotten blubber expanding their nostrils. With one accord they cast aside the masks.

"It ain't such a hell of a fortune," growled Pulz, his evil little white face thrust forward. "There's other things worth all the seal trimmin's of the islands."

"Diamon's," gloomed the Nigger.

"You've hit it, Doctor," cut in Solomon.

There we were again, back to the old difficulty, only worse. Idleness descended on us again. We grew touchy on little things, as a misplaced plate, a shortage of firewood, too deep a draught at the nearly empty bucket. The noise of bickering became as constant as the noise of the surf. If we valued peace, we kept our mouths shut. The way a man spat, or ate, or slept, or even breathed became a cause of irritation to every

other member of the company. We stood the outrage as long as we could; then we objected in a wild and ridiculous explosion which communicated its heat to the object of our wrath. Then there was a fight. It needed only liquor to complete the deplorable state of affairs.

Gradually the smaller things came to worry us more and more. A certain harmless singer of the cricket or perhaps of the tree-toad variety used to chirp his innocent note a short distance from our cabin. For all I know he had done so from the moment of our installation, but I had never noticed him before. Now I caught myself listening for his irregular recurrence with every nerve on the quiver. If he delayed by ever so little, it was an agony; yet when he did pipe up, his feeble strain struck to my heart cold and paralysing like a dagger. And with every advancing minute of the night I became broader awake, more tense, fairly sweating with nervousness. One night—good God, was it only last week? . . . it seems ages ago, another existence . . . a state cut off from this by the wonder of a transmigration, at least. . . . Last week!

I did not sleep at all. The moon had risen, had mounted the heavens, and now was sailing overhead. By the fretwork of its radiance through the chinks of our rudely-built cabin I had marked off the hours. A thunderstorm rumbled and flashed, hull down over the horizon. It was many miles distant, and yet I do not doubt that its electrical influence had dried the moisture of our equanimity, leaving us rattling husks for the winds of destiny to play upon. Certainly I can

remember no other time, in a rather wide experience, when I have felt myself more on edge, more choked with the restless, purposeless nervous energy that leaves a man's tongue parched and his eyes staring. And still that infernal cricket, or whatever it was, chirped.

I had thought myself alone in my vigil, but when finally I could stand it no longer, and kicked aside my covering with an oath of protest, I was surprised to hear it echoed from all about me.

"Damn that cricket!" I cried.

And the dead shadows stirred from the bunks, and the hollow-eyed victims of insomnia crept out to curse their tormentor. We organised an expedition to hunt him down. It was ridiculous enough, six strong men prowling for the life of one poor little insect. We did not find him, however, though we succeeded in silencing him. But no sooner were we back in our bunks than he began it again, and such was the turmoil of our nerves that day found us sitting wan about a fire, hugging our knees.

We were so genuinely emptied, not so much by the cricket as by the two years of fermentation, that not one of us stirred toward breakfast, in fact not one of us moved from the listless attitude in which day found him, until after nine o'clock. Then we pulled ourselves together and cooked coffee and salt horse. As a significant fact, the Nigger left the dishes unwashed, and no one cared.

Handy Solomon finally shook himself and arose.

"I'm sick of this," said he, "I'm goin' seal-hunting."

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They arose without a word. They were sick of it, too, sick to death. We were a silent, gloomy crew indeed as we thrust the surf boat afloat, clambered in, and shipped the oars. No one spoke a word; no one had a comment to make, even when we saw the rookery slide into the water while we were still fifty yards from the beach. We pulled back slowly along the coast. Beyond the rock we made out the entrance to the dry cave.

"There's seal in there," cried Handy Solomon, "lots of 'em!"

He thrust the rudder over, and we headed for the cave. No one expressed an opinion.

As it was again high tide, we rowed in to the steep shore inside the cave's mouth and beached the boat. The place was full of seals; we could hear them bellowing.

"Two of you stand here," shouted Handy Solomon, "and take them as they go out. We'll go in and scare 'em down to you."

"They'll run over us," screamed Pulz.

"No, they won't. You can dodge up the sides when they go by."

This was indeed well possible, so we gripped our clubs and ventured into the darkness.

We advanced four abreast, for the cave was wide enough for that. As we penetrated, the bellowing and barking became more deafening. It was impossible to see anything, although we *felt* an indistinguishable tumbling mass receding before our footsteps. Thrackles swore violently as he stumbled over a lag-gard. With uncanny abruptness the black wall of

darkness in front of us was alive with fiery eyeballs. The seals had reached the end of the cave and had turned toward us. We, too, stopped, a little uncertain as to how to proceed.

The first plan had been to get behind the band and to drive it slowly toward the entrance to the cave. This was now seen to be impossible. The cavern was too narrow; its sides at this point too steep, and the animals too thickly congested. Our eyes, becoming accustomed to the twilight, now began to make out dimly the individual bodies of the seals and the general configuration of the rocks. One big boulder lay directly in our path, like an island in the shale of the cave's floor. Perdosa stepped to the top of it for a better look. The men attempted to communicate their ideas of what was to be done, but could not make themselves heard above the uproar. I could see their faces contorting with the fury of being baffled. A big bull made a dash to get by; all the herd flippered after him. If he had won past they would have followed as obstinately as sheep, and nothing could have stopped them, but the big bull went down beneath the clubs. Thrackles hit the animal two vindictive blows after it had succumbed.

This settled the revolt, and we stood as before. Pulz and Handy Solomon tried to converse by signs, but evidently failed, for their faces showed angry in the twilight. Perdosa, on his rock, rolled and lit a cigarette. Thrackles paced to and fro, and the Nigger leaned on his club, farther down the cave. They had been left at the entrance, but now in lack of results had joined their companions.

Now Thrackles approached and screamed himself black trying to impart some plan. He failed; but stooped and picked up a stone and threw it into the mass of seals. The others understood. A shower of stones followed. The animals milled like cattle, bel-
lowed the louder, but would not face their tormentors. Finally an old cow flopped by in a panic. I thought they would have let her go, but she died a little be-
yond the bull. No more followed, although the men threw stones as fast and hard as they were able. Their faces were livid with anger, like that of an evil-tem-
pered man with an obstinate horse.

Suddenly Handy Solomon put his head down, and with a roar distinctly audible even above the din that filled the cave, charged directly into the herd. I saw the beasts cringe before him; I saw his club rising and falling indiscriminately; and then the whole back of the cave seemed to rise and come at us.

This was no chance of sport now, but a struggle for very life. We realised that once down there would be no hope, for while the seals were more anxious to escape than to fight, we knew that their jaws were powerful. There was no time to pick and choose. We hit out with all the strength and quickness we pos-
sessed. It was like a bad dream, like struggling with an elusive hydra-headed monster, knee high, invul-
nerable. We hit, but without apparent effect. New heads rose, the press behind increased. We gave ground. We staggered, struggling desperately to keep our feet.

How long this lasted I cannot tell. It seemed hours. I know my arms became leaden from swinging my

club; my eyes were full of sweat; my breath gasped. A sharp pain in my knee nearly doubled me to the ground and yet I remember clamping to the thought that I must keep my feet, keep my feet at any cost. Then all at once I recalled the fact that I was armed. I jerked out the short-barrelled Colt's 45 and turned it loose in their faces.

Whether the flash and detonation frightened them; whether Perdosa, still clinging to his rock, managed to turn their attention by his flanking efforts, or whether, quite simply, the wall of dead finally turned them back, I do not know, but with one accord they gave over the attempt.

I looked at once for Handy Solomon, and was surprised to see him still alive, standing upright on a ledge the other side of the herd. His clothing was literally torn to shreds, and he was covered with blood. But in this plight he was not alone, for when I turned toward my companions they, too, were tattered, torn, and gory. We were a dreadful crew, standing there in the half-light, our chests heaving, our rags dripping red.

For perhaps ten seconds no one moved. Then with a yell of demoniac rage my companions clambered over the rampart of dead seals and attacked the herd.

The seals were now cowed and defenceless. It was a slaughter, and the most debauching and brutal I have ever known. I had hit out with the rest when it had been a question of defence, but from this I turned aside in a sick loathing. The men seemed possessed of devils, and of their unnatural energy. Perdosa cast aside the club and took to his natural weapon, the knife.

I can see him yet rolling over and over embracing a big cow, his head jammed in an ecstasy of ferocity between the animal's front flippers, his legs clasped to hold her body, only his right arm rising and falling as he plunged his knife again and again. She struggled, turning him over and under, wept great tears, and fairly whined with terror and pain. Finally she was still, and Perdosa staggered to his feet, only to stare about him drunkenly for a moment before throwing himself with a screech on another victim.

The Nigger alone did not jump into the turmoil. He stood just down the cave, his club ready. Occasionally a disorganised rush to escape would be made. The Nigger's lips snarled, and with a truly mad enjoyment he beat the poor animals back.

I pressed against the wall horrified, fascinated, unable either to interfere or to leave. A close, sticky smell took possession of the air. After a little a tiny stream, growing each moment, began to flow past my feet. It sought its channel daintily, as streamlets do, feeling among the stones in eddies, quiet pools, miniature falls, and rapids. For the moment I did not realise what it could be. Then the light caught it down where the Nigger waited, and I saw it was red.

At first the racket of the seals was overpowering. Now, gradually, it was losing volume. I began to hear the blasphemies, ferocious cries, screams of anger hurled against the cave walls by the men. The thick, sticky smell grew stronger; the light seemed to grow dimmer, as though it could not burn in that fetid air. A seal came and looked up at me, big tears rolling from her eyes; then she flippers away aimlessly, out of her

poor wits with terror. The sight finished me. I staggered down the length of the black tunnel to the boat.

After a long interval a little three months' pup waddled down to the water's edge, caught sight of me, and with a squeal of fright dived far. Poor little devil! I would not have hurt him for worlds. As far as I know this was the only survivor of all that herd.

The men soon appeared, one by one, tired, sleepy-eyed, gluttoned, walking in a cat-like trance of satiety. They were blood and tatters from head to foot, and from drying red masks peered their bloodshot eyes. Not a word said they, but tumbled into the boat, pushed off, and in a moment we were floating in the full sunshine again.

We rowed home in an abstraction. For the moment Berserker rage had burned itself out. Handy Solomon continually wetted his lips, like an animal licking its chops. Thrackles stared into space through eyes drugged with killing. No one spoke.

We landed in the cove, and were surprised to find it in shadow. The afternoon was far advanced. Over the hill we dragged ourselves, and down to the spring. There the men threw themselves flat and drank in great gulps until they could drink no more. We built a fire, but the Nigger refused to cook.

"Someone else turn," he growled, "I cook aboard ship."

Perdosa, who had hewed the fuel, at once became angry.

"I cut heem de wood!" he said, "I do my share; eef I cut heem de wood you mus' cook heem de grub!"

But the Nigger shook his head, and Perdosa went

into an ecstasy of rage. He kicked the fire to pieces; he scattered the unburned wood up and down the beach; he even threw some of it into the sea.

"Eef you no cook heem de grub, you no hab my wood!" he shrieked, with enough oaths to sink his soul.

Finally Pulz interfered.

"Here you damn foreigners," said he, "quit it! Let up, I say! We got to eat. You let that wood alone, or you'll pick it up again!"

Perdosa sprang at him with a screech. Pulz was small but nimble, and understood rough and tumble fighting. He met Perdosa's rush with two swift blows—a short arm jab and an upper-cut. Then they clinched, and in a moment were rolling over and over just beyond the wash of the surf.

The row waked the Nigger from his sullen abstraction. He seemed to come to himself with a start; his eye fell surprisedly on the combatants, then lit up with an unholy joy. He drew his knife and crept down on the fighters. It was too good an opportunity to pay off the Mexican.

But Thrackles interfered sharply.

"Come off!" he commanded. "None o' that!"

"Go to hell!" growled the Nigger.

A great rage fell on them all, blind and terrible, like that leading to the slaughter of the seals. They fought indiscriminately, hitting at each other with fists and knives. It was difficult to tell who was against whom. The sound of heavy breathing, dull blows, the tear of cloth, and grunts of punishment received; the swirl of the sand, the heave of struggling bodies, all riveted my

attention, so that I did not see Captain Ezra Selover until he stood almost at my elbow.

"Stop!" he shrieked in his high, falsetto voice.

And would you believe it, even through the blood haze of their combat the men heard him, and heeded. They drew reluctantly apart, got to their feet, stood looking at him through reeking brows half submissive and half defiant. The bull-headed Thrackles even took a half step forward, but froze in his tracks when Old Scrubs looked at him.

"I hire you men to fight when I tell you to, and only then," said the captain sternly. "What does this mean?"

He menaced them one after another with his eyes, and one after another they quailed. All their plottings, their threats, their dangerousness dissipated like mist before the command of this one resolute man. These pirates who had seemed so dreadful to me, now were nothing more than cringing schoolboys before their master.

And then suddenly to my horror I, watching closely, saw the captain's eye turn blank. I am sure the men must have felt the change, though certainly they were too far away to see it, for they shifted by ever so little from their first frozen attitude. The captain's hand sought his pocket, and they froze again, but instead of the expected revolver, he produced a half-full brandy bottle.

The change in his eyes had crept into his features. They had turned foolishly amiable, vacant, confiding.

"'llo boys," said he appealingly, "you good fellows, ain't you? Have a drink. 'S good stuff. Good

ol' bottl'," he lurched, caught himself, and advanced toward them, still with the empty smile.

They stared at him for ten seconds, quite at a loss. Then:

"By God, he's drunk!" Handy Solomon breathed, scarcely louder than a whisper.

There was no other signal given. They sprang as with a single impulse. One instant I saw clear against the waning daylight the bulky, foolish-swaying form of Captain Selover: the next it had disappeared, carried down and obliterated by the rush of attacking bodies. Knives gleamed ruddy in the sunset. There was no struggle. I heard a deep groan. Then the murderers rose slowly to their feet.

XIII

I MAKE MY ESCAPE

I HAD plenty of time to run away. I do not know why I did not do so; but the fact stands that I remained where I was until they had finished Captain Selover. Then I took to my heels, but was soon cornered. I drew my revolver, remembered that I had emptied it in the seal cave—and had time for no more coherent mental processes. A smothering weight flung itself on me, against which I struggled as hard as I could, shrinking in anticipation from the thirsty plunge of the knives. However, though the weight increased until further struggle was impossible, I was not harmed, and in a few moments found myself, wrists and ankles tied, beside a roaring fire. While I collected myself I heard the grate of a boat being shoved off from the cove, and a few moments later made out lights aboard the *Laughing Lass*.

The looting party returned very shortly. Their plundering had gone only as far as liquor and arms. Thrackles let down from the cliff top a keg at the end of a line. Perdosa and the Nigger each carried an armful of the 30-40 rifles. The keg was rolled to the fire and broached.

The men got drunk, wildly drunk, but not helplessly so. A flame communicated itself to them through the liquor. The ordinary characteristics of their compo-

sition sprung into sharper relief. The Nigger became more sullen; Perdosa more snake-like; Pulz more viciously evil; Thrackles more brutal; while Handy Solomon staggering from his seat to the open keg and back again, roaring fragments of a chanty, his red headgear contrasting with his smoky black hair and his swarthy hook-nosed countenance—he needed no further touch.

Their evil passions were all awake, and the plan, so long indefinite, developed like a photographer's plate.

"That's one," said Thrackles. "One gone to hell."

"And now the diamonds," muttered Pulz.

"There's a ship upon the windward, a wreck upon the lee,

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e,"

roared Handy Solomon. "Damn it all, boys, it's the best night's work we ever did. The stuff's ours. Then it's me for a big stone house in Frisco O!"

"Frisco, hell," sneered Pulz, "that's all you know. You ought to travel. Paris for me and a little gal to learn the language from."

"I get heem a fine *caballo*, an' fine saddle, an' fine clo's," breathed Perdosa sentimentally. "I ride, and the silver jingle, and the *señorita* look——"

Thrackles was for a ship and the China trade.

"What you want, Doctor?" they demanded of the silent Nigger.

But the Nigger only rolled his eyes and shook his head. By and by he arose and disappeared in the dusk and was no more seen.

"Dam' fool," muttered Handy Solomon. "Well, here's to crime!"

He drank a deep cup of the raw rum, and staggered back to his seat on the sands.

" 'I am not a man-o'-war, nor a privateer,' said he.

Blow high, blow low! What care we!

'But I am a jolly pirate and I'm sailing for my fee,'

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e."

he sang. "We'll land in Valparaiso and we'll go every man his way; and we'll sink the old *Laughing Lass* so deep the mermaids can't find her."

Thrackles piled on more wood and the fire leaped high.

"Let's get after 'em," said he.

"To-morrow's jes' 's good," muttered Pulz. "Les' hav' 'nother drink."

"We'll stay here 'n see if our ol' frien' Percy don' show up," said Handy Solomon. He threw back his head and roared forth a volume of sound toward the dim stars.

"Broadside to broadside the gallant ships did lay,

Blow high, blow low! What care we?

'Til the jolly man-o'-war shot the pirate's mast away,

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e."

I saw near me a live coal dislodged from the fire when Thrackles had thrown on the armful of wood. An idea came to me. I hitched myself to the spark, and laid across it the rope with which my wrists were tied. This, behind my back, was not easy to accomplish, and twice I burned my wrists before I succeeded.

Fortunately I was at the edge of illumination, and behind the group. I turned over on my side so that my back was toward the fire. Then rapidly I cast loose my ankle lashings. Thus I was free, and selecting a moment when universal attention was turned toward the rum barrel, I rolled over a sand dune, got to my hands and knees, and crept away.

Through the coarse grass I crept thus, to the very entrance of the arroyo, then rose to my feet. In the middle distance the fire leaped red. Its glow fell intermittently on the surges rolling in. The men staggered or lay prone, either as gigantic silhouettes or as tatterdemalions painted by the light. The keg stood solid and substantial, the hub about which reeled the orgy. At the edge of the wash I could make out something prone, dim, limp, thrown constantly in new positions of weariness as the water ebbed and flowed beneath it, now an arm thrown out, now cast back, as though Old Scrubs slept feverishly. The drunkards were getting noisy. Handy Solomon still reeled off the verses of his song. The others joined in, frightfully off the key; or punctuated the performance by wild staccato yells.

"Their coffin was their ship and their grave it was the sea,

Blow high, blow low! What care we?

And the quarter that we gave them was to sink them in the sea,

Down on the coast of the high Barbare-e-e,"

bellowed Handy Solomon.

I turned and plunged into the cool darkness of the cañon.

XIV

AN ADVENTURE IN THE NIGHT

TEN seconds after entering the arroyo I was stumbling along in an absolute blackness. It almost seemed to me that I could reach out my hands and touch it, as one would touch a wall. Or perhaps not exactly that, for a wall is hard, and this darkness was soft and yielding, in the manner of enveloping hangings. Directly above me was a narrow, jagged, and irregular strip of sky with stars. I splashed in the brook, finding its waters strangely warm, rustled through the grasses, my head back, chin out, hands extended as one makes his way through a house at night. There were no sounds except the tinkle of the sulphurous stream: successive bends in the cañon wall had shut off even the faintest echoes of the bacchanalia on the beach.

The way seemed much longer than by daylight. Already in my calculation I had traversed many times the distance, when, with a jump at the heart, I made out a glow ahead, and in front of it the upright logs of the stockade.

To my surprise the gate was open. I ascended the gentle slope to the valley's level—and stumbled over a man lying prostrate, shivering violently, and moaning.

I bent over to discover whom it might be. As I did so a brilliant light seemed to fill the valley, throwing an illumination on the man at my feet. I

saw it was the Nigger, and perceived at the same instant that he was almost beside himself with terror. His eyes rolled, his teeth chattered, his frame contracted in a strong convulsion, and the black of his complexion had faded to a washed-out dirty grey, revolting to contemplate. He felt my touch and sprang to his feet, clutching me by the shoulder as a man clutching rescue.

"My Gawd!" he shivered. "Look! Dar it is again!"

He fell to pattering in a tongue unknown to me—charms, spells, undoubtedly, to exorcise the devils that had hold of him. I followed the direction of his gaze, and myself cried out.

The doctor's laboratory stood in plain sight between the two columns of steam blown straight upward through the stillness of the evening. It seemed bursting with light. Every little crack leaked it in generous streams, while the main illumination appeared fairly to bulge the walls outward. This was in itself nothing extraordinary, and indicated only the activity of those within, but while I looked an irregular patch of incandescence suddenly splashed the cliff opposite. For a single instant the very substance of the rock glowed white hot; then from the spot a shower of spiteful flakes shot as from a pryotechnic, and the light was blotted out as suddenly as it came. At the same moment it appeared at another point, exhibited the same phenomena, died, flashed out at still a third place, and so was repeated here and there with bewildering rapidity until the walls of the valley crackled and spat sparks. Abruptly the darkness fell.

'As abruptly it was broken again by a similar exhibition; only this time the fire was blue. Blue was followed by purple, purple by red. Then ensued the briefest possible pause, in which a figure moved across the bars of light escaping through the chinks of the laboratory, and then the whole valley blazed with patches of vari-coloured fire. It was not a reflection: it was actual physical conflagration of the solid rock, in irregular areas. Some of the fire shapes were most fantastic. And with the unexpectedness of a bursting shell the surface of the ground before our feet crackled into a ghastly blue flame.

The Nigger uttered a cry in his throat and disappeared. I felt a sharp breath on my neck, an ejaculation of surprise at my very ear. It was startling enough to scare the soul out of a man, but I held fast and was just about to step forward, when my collar was twisted tight from behind. I raised both hands, felt steel, and knew that I was in the grasp of Handy Solomon's claw.

The sailor had me foul. I did my best to twist around, to unbutton the collar, but in vain. I felt my wind leaving me, the ghastly blue light was shot with red. Distinctly I heard the man's sharp intaken breath as some new phenomenon met his eye, and his great oath as he swore.

"By the mother of God!" he cried, "it's the devil."

Then I was jerked off my feet, and the next I knew I was lying on my back, very wet, on the beach; the day was breaking, and the men, quite sober, were talking vehemently.

It was impossible to make out what they said, but

as Handy Solomon and the Nigger were the centre of discussion, I could imagine the subject. I felt very stiff and sore and hazy in my mind. My neck was lame from the dragging and my tongue dry from the choking. For some time I lay in a half-torpor watching the lilac of dawn change to the rose of sunrise, utterly indifferent to everything. They had thrown me down across the first rise of the little sand dunes back of the tide sands, and from it I could at once look out over the sea full of the restless shadows of dawn, and the land narrowing to the mouth of the arroyo. I remember wondering whether Captain Selover were up yet. Then with a sharp stab at the heart I remembered.

The thought was like a dash of cold water in clearing my faculties. I raised my head. Seaward a white gull had caught the first rays of the sun beyond the cliffs. Landward—I saw with a choke in my throat—a figure emerging from the arroyo.

At the sight I made a desperate attempt to move, but with the effort discovered that I was again bound. My stirring thus called Pulz's attention. Before I could look away he had followed the direction of my gaze. The discussion instantly ceased. They waited in grim silence.

I did not know what to do. Percy Darrow, carrying some sort of large book, was walking rapidly toward us. Perdosa had disappeared. Thrackles after an instant came and sat beside me and clapped his big hand over my mouth. It was horrible.

When within a hundred paces or so, I could see that Darrow laboured under some great excitement. His usual indifferent saunter had, as I have indicated,

given way to a firm and decided step; his ironical eye glistened; his sallow cheek glowed.

"Boys," he shouted cheerfully. "The time's up. We've succeeded. We'll sail just as soon as the Lord'll let us get ready. Rustle the stuff aboard. The doctor'll be down in a short time, and we ought to be loaded by night."

Handy Solomon and Pulz laid hand on two of the rifles near by and began surreptitiously to fill their magazines. The Nigger shook his knife free of the scabbard and sat with it in his left hand, concealed by his body. I could feel Thrackles's muscles stiffen. Another fifty paces and it would be no longer necessary to stop my mouth.

The thought made me desperate. I had failed as a leader of these men, and I had been forced to stand by at debauching, cruel, and murderous affairs, but now it is over I thank Heaven the reproach cannot be made against me that at any time I counted the consequences to myself. Thrackles's hand lay heavy across my mouth. I bit it to the bone, and as he involuntarily snatched it away, I rolled over toward the sea.

Thus for an instant I had my mouth free.

"Run! Run!" I shouted. "For God's sake——"

Thrackles leaped upon me and struck me heavily upon the mouth, then sprang for a rifle. I managed to struggle back to the dune, whence I could see.

XV

FIVE HUNDRED YARDS' RANGE

PERCY DARROW, with the keenness that always characterised his mental apprehension, had understood enough of my strangled cry. He had not hesitated nor delayed for an explanation, but had turned track and was now running as fast as his long legs would carry him back toward the opening of the ravine. My companions stood watching him, but making no attempt either to shoot or to follow. For a moment I could not understand this, then remembered the disappearance of Perdosa. My heart jumped wildly, for the Mexican had been gone quite long enough to have cut off the assistant's escape. I could not doubt that he would pick off his man at close range as soon as the fugitive should have reached the entrance to the arroyo.

There can be no question that he would have done so had not his Mexican impatience betrayed him. He shot too soon. Percy Darrow stopped in his tracks. Although we heard the bullet sing by us, for an instant we thought he was hit. Then Perdosa fired a second time, again without result. Darrow turned sharp to the left and began desperately to scale the steep cliffs.

I once took part in a wild boar hunt on the coast of California. Our dogs had penned a small band at

the head of a narrow *barranca*, from which a single steep trail led over the hill. We, perched on another hill some three or four hundred yards away, shot at the animals as they toiled up the trail. The range was long, but we had time, for the severity of the climb forced the boars to a foot pace.

It was exactly like that. Percy Darrow had two hundred feet of ascent to make. He could go just so fast; must consume just so much time in his snail-like progress up the face of the hill. During that time he furnished an excellent target, and the loose sandstone showed where each shot struck.

A significant indication was that the men did not take the trouble to get nearer, for which manœuvre they would have had time in plenty, but distributed themselves leisurely for a shooting match.

"First shot," claimed Handy Solomon, and without delay fired off-hand. A puff of dust showed to the right. "Nerve no good," he commented, "jerked her just as I pulled."

Pulz fired from the knee. The dust this time puffed below.

"Thought she'd carry up at that distance," he muttered.

The Nigger, too, missed, and Thrackles grinned triumphantly.

"I get a show," said he.

He spread his massive legs apart, drew a deep breath, and raised his weapon. It lay in his grasp steady as a log, and I saw that Percy Darrow's fate was in the hands of that dangerous class of natural marksman that possesses no nerves. But for the sec-

ond time my teeth saved his life. The trigger guard slipped against Thrackles's lacerated hand almost at the instant of discharge. He missed; and the bullet went wide.

Darrow had climbed a matter of twenty feet.

Now the seamen distributed themselves for more leisurely and accurate marksmanship. Handy Solomon lay flat on his stomach, resting the rifle muzzle across the top of a sand dune. Pulz sat down, an elbow on either knee for the greater steadiness. The Nigger knelt; but Thrackles remained on his feet. No rest could be steadier than the stone-like rigidity of his thick arms.

The firing now became miscellaneous. No one paid any attention to anyone else. Each discovered what I could have told them, that even the human figure at five hundred yards is a small mark for a strange rifle. The constant correction of elevation, however, brought the puffs of dust always closer, and I could not but realise that the doctrine of chances must bring home some of the bullets. I soon discovered by way of comfort that only Thrackles and Handy Solomon really understood firearms; and of those two Thrackles alone had had much experience at long range. He told me afterward he had hunted otter.

About halfway up the cliff Thrackles fired his fifth shot. No dust followed the discharge; and I saw Percy Darrow stagger and almost lose his hold. The men yelled savagely, but the assistant pulled himself together and continued his crawling.

The sun had been shining in our faces. I could imagine its blurring effect on the sights. Now ab-

ruptly it was blotted out, and a semi-twilight fell. We all looked up, in spite of ourselves. An opaque veil had been drawn quite across the heavens, through which we could not make out even the shape of the sun. It was like a thunder cloud except that its under surface instead of being the usual grey-black was a deep earth-brown. As we looked up, a deep bellow stirred the air, which had fallen quite still, long forks of lightning shot horizontally from the direction of the island's interior, and flashes of dull red were reflected from the canopy of cloud.

The men stared with their mouths open. Undoubtedly the change had been some time in preparation, but all had been so absorbed in the affair of the doctor's assistant that no one had noticed. It came to our consciousness with the suddenness of a theatrical change. A dull roaring commenced, grew in volume, and then a great explosion shook the very ground under our feet.

We stared at each other, our faces whitening.

"What kind of hell has broke loose?" muttered Pulz.

The Nigger fell flat on his face, uttering deep lamentations.

"Voodoo! Voodoo!" he groaned.

A gentle shower of white flakes began, powdering the surface of everything. Far out to sea we could make out the sun on the water. Gradually the roaring died down; the lightning ceased. Comparative peace ensued. We looked again toward the cliff. Percy Darrow had not for one instant ceased to climb. He was just topping the edge of the bluff. Handy Solomon,



The firing now became miscellaneous. No one paid any
attention to any one else

with a cry of rage, seized another rifle and emptied the magazine at him as fast as the lever could be worked. The dust flew wild in a half dozen places. Darrow drew himself up to the sky line, raised his hat ironically, and disappeared.

"Damn his soul!" cried Handy Solomon, his face livid. He threw his rifle to the beach and danced on it in an ecstasy of rage.

"What do we care," growled Thrackles, "he's no good to us. W'at I want to know is, wat's up here, anyhow!"

"Didn't you never see a volcano go off, you swab?" snapped Handy Solomon.

"Easy with your names, mate. No, I never did. We better get out."

"Without the chest?"

"S'pose we go up the gulch and get it, then," suggested Thrackles.

But at this Handy Solomon drew back in evident terror.

"Up that hole of hell?" he objected. "Not I. You an' Pulz go."

They wrangled over it, Pulz joining. Perdosa, shaken to the soul, crept in, and made a bee-line for the rum barrel. He and the Nigger were frankly scared. They had the nervous jumps at every little noise or unexpected movement; and even the natural explanation of these phenomena gave them very little reassurance. I knew that Darrow would hurry as fast as he could back to the valley by way of the upper hills; I knew that he had there several sporting rifles; and I hoped greatly that he and Dr. Schermerhorn

might accomplish something before the men had recovered their wits to the point of foreseeing his probable attack. The uncanny cloud in the heavens, the weird half-light, and the explosions, which now grew more frequent, had their strong effect in spite of explanation. The men were not really afraid to venture in quest of the supposed treasure; but they were in a frame of mind that dreaded the first plunge. And time was going by.

But the fates were against us, as always in this ill-starred voyage. I, watching from my sand dune, saw a second figure emerge from the arroyo's mouth. It appeared to stagger as though hurt; and every eight or ten paces it stopped and rested in a bent-over position. The murky light was too dim for me to make out details; but after a moment a rift in the veil enabled me to identify Dr. Schermerhorn carrying, with great difficulty, the chest.

XVI

THE MURDER

I TOOK no chances, but began at once to shout, as soon as I saw the men had noticed his coming. It was impossible for me to tell whether or not Dr. Schermerhorn heard me. If he did, he misunderstood my intention, for he continued painfully to advance. The only result I gained was to get myself well gagged with my own pocket handkerchief, and thrown in a hollow between the dunes. Thence I could hear Handy Solomon speaking fiercely and rapidly.

"Now you let me run this," he commanded; "we got to find out somethin'. It ain't no good to us without we knows—and we want to find out how he's got the rest hid."

They assented.

"I'm goin' out to help him carry her in," announced the seaman.

A long pause ensued, in which I watched the deep canopy of red-black thicken overhead. A strange and unearthly light had fallen on the world, and the air was quite still. After a while I heard Handy Solomon and Dr. Schermerhorn join the group.

"There you are, Perfessor," cried Handy Solomon, in tones of the greatest heartiness, "I'll put her right there, and she'll be as safe as a babby at home. She's heavy, though."

Dr. Schermerhorn laughed a pleased and excited laugh. I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was strung high, and guessed that his triumph needed an audience.

"You may say so well!" he said. "It iss heafy; and it iss heafy with the world-desire, the great substance than can do efferything. Where iss Percy?"

"He's gone aboard."

"We must embark. The time is joost right. A day sooner and the eggsperiment would haf been spoilt; but now"—he laughed—"let the island sink, we do not care. We must embark hastily."

"It'll take a man long time to carry down all your things, Perfessor."

"Oh, led them go! The eruption has alretty swallowed them oop. The lava iss by now a foot deep in the valley. Before long it flows here, so we must embark."

"But you've lost all them vallyable things, Perfessor," said Handy Solomon. "Now, I call that hard luck."

Dr. Schermerhorn snapped his fingers.

"They do not amount to that!" he cried. "Here, here, in this leetle box iss all the treasure! Here iss the labour of ten years! Here iss the *Laughing Lass*, and the crew, and all the equipmendt comprised. Here iss the world!"

"I'm a plain seaman, Perfessor, and I suppose I got to believe you; but she's a main small box for all that."

"With that small box you can haf all your wishes," asserted the Professor, still in the German lyric strain

over his triumph. "It iss the box of enchantments. You haf but to will the change you would haf taig place—it iss done. The substance of the rocks, the molecule—all!"

"Could a man make diamonds?" asked Pulz abruptly. I could hear the sharp intake of the men's breathing as they hung on the reply.

"Much more wonderful changes than that it can accomplish," replied the doctor, with an indulgent laugh. "That change iss simple. Carbon iss coal; carbon iss diamond. You see? One has but to change the form, not the substance."

"Then it'll change coal to diamonds?" asked Handy Solomon.

"Yes, you gather my meanings——"

I heard a sharp squeak like a terrified mouse. Then a long, dreadful silence; then two dull, heavy blows, spaced with deliberation. A moment later I caught a glimpse of Handy Solomon bent forward to the labour of dragging a body toward the sea, his steel claw hooked under the angle of the jaw as a man handles a fish. Pulz came and threw off my bonds and gag.

"Come along!" said he.

All kept looking fearfully toward the arroyo. A dense white steam marked its course. The air was now heavy with portent. Successive explosions, some light, some severe, shook the foundations of the island. Great rocks and boulders bounded down the hills. The flashes of lightning had become more frequent. We moved, exaggerated to each other's vision by the strange light, uncouth and gigantic.

"Let's get out of this!" cried Thrackles.

We turned at the word and ran, Thrackles staggering under the weight of the chest. All our belongings we abandoned, and set out for the *Laughing Lass* with only the tatters in which we stood. Luckily for us a great part of the ship's stores had been returned to her hold after the last thorough scrubbing, so we were in subsistence, but all our clothes, all our personal belongings, were left behind us on the beach. For after once we had topped the cliff that led over to the cove, I doubt if any consideration on earth would have induced us to return to that accursed place.

The row out to the ship was wet and dangerous. Seismic disturbances were undoubtedly responsible for high pyramidal waves that lifted and fell without onward movement. We fairly tumbled up out of the dory, which we did not hoist on deck, but left at the end of the painter to beat her sides against the ship.

XVII

THE OPEN SEA

OUR haste, however, availed us little, for there was no wind at all. We lay for over two hours under the weird light, over-canopied by the red-brown cloud, while the explosions shook the foundations of the world. Nobody ventured below. The sails flapped idly from the masts: the blocks and spars creaked: the three-cornered waves rose straight up and fell again as though reaching from the deep.

When the men first began to sweat the sails up, evidently in preparation for an immediate departure, I objected vehemently.

"You aren't going to leave him on the island," I cried. "He'll die of starvation."

They did not answer me; but after a little more, when my expostulations had become more positive, Handy Solomon dropped the halliard, and drew me to one side.

"Look here, you," he snarled, "you'd better just stow your gab. You're lucky to be here yourself, let alone botherin' your thick head about anybody else, and you can kiss the Book on that! Do you know why you ain't with them carrion?" He jerked his thumb toward the beach. "It's because Solomon Anderson's your friend. Thrackles would have killed you in a minute 'count of his bit hand. I got you your chance.

Now don't you be a fool, for I ain't goin' to stand between you and them another time. Besides, he won't last long if that volcano keeps at it."

He left me. Whatever truth lay in his assumption of friendship, and I doubted there existed much of either truth or friendship in him, I saw the common sense of his advice. I was in no position to dictate a course of action.

After the sails were on her we gathered at the starboard rail to watch the shore. There the hills ran into inky blackness, as the horizon sometimes merges into a thunder squall. A dense white steam came from the creek bed within the arroyo. The surges beat on the shore louder than the ordinary, and the foam, even in these day hours, seemed to throw up a faint phosphorescence. Frequent earthquakes oscillated the landscape. We watched, I do not know for what, our eyes straining into the murk of the island. Nobody thought of the chest, which lay on the cabin table aft. I contributed maliciously my bit to their fear.

"These volcanic islands sometimes sink entirely," I suggested, "and in that case we'd be carried down by the suction."

It was intended merely to increase their uneasiness, but, strangely enough, after a few moments it ended by imposing itself on my own fears. I began to be afraid the island would sink, began to watch for it, began to share the fascinated terror of these men.

The suspense after a time became unbearable, for while the portent—whether physical or moral we were too far under its influence to distinguish—grew mo-

mentarily, our own souls did not expand in due correspondence. We talked of towing, of kedging out, of going to any extreme, even to small boats. Then just as we were about to move toward some accomplishment, a new phenomenon chained our attention to the shore.

In the mouth of the arroyo appeared a red glow. A moment later a wave of lava, white-hot, red, iridescent, cooling to a black crust cracked in incandescence, rolled majestically out over the grassy plain. Each instant it grew in volume, until the ravine must have been flowing half full.

Before its scorching the grasses even at the edge of the sea were smoking, and our camp had already burst into flames. We had to shield our faces against the heat, and the wooden railing under our hands was growing warm.

Pulz turned an ashy countenance toward us.

"My God," he screamed. "What's going to happen when she hits the sea?"

She hit the sea, and immediately a great cloud of steam arose, and the hissing as of a thousand serpents. We felt the strong suction under our keel, and staggered under the jerk of the ship's cable as she swung toward the beach. The paint was beginning to crackle along the rail. We could see nothing for the scalding white veil that enveloped us; we could hear nothing for the roar of steam, the bombardment of explosions, and the crash of thunder; but our nostrils were assaulted by a most unearthly medley of smells.

"Hell's loose," growled Thrackles.

We were clinging hard as the ship reeled. Huge

surges were racing in from seaward, growing larger with each successive billow.

Handy Solomon raised his head, listened intently, and struck his forehead.

"Wind," he screamed at the top of his voice, and jumped for the halliards.

Thrackles followed him, but no one else moved. In an instant the two were back, striking and kicking savagely, rousing their companions to the danger. We all laid into the canvas like mad, and in no time had snugged down to a staysail and the peak of our mainsail. Thrackles drew his knife and jumped for the cable, while Handy Solomon, his eyes snapping, seized the wheel.

We finished just in time. I was turning away after tying the last gasket on the foresail, when the deck up-ended and tipped me headforemost into the starboard scupper. At the same time a smother of salt water blew over the port rail, now far above me, to drench me as thoroughly as though I had fallen overboard. I brushed out my eyes to find the ship smack on her beam ends, and the wind howling by from the sea.

I had company enough in the scuppers. Only Handy Solomon clung desperately to the wheel, jamming his weight to port in the hope she might pay up: Thrackles, too, his eye squinted along some bearing of his own, was waiting for her to drag. Presently it became evident that she was doing so, whereupon he drew his knife across our hawser.

"My God," chattered Pulz at my ear. "If we go ashore——"

He did not need to finish. Unless the *Laughing Lass* could recover before the squall had driven her to leeward a scant half mile, we should be cooked alive in the boiling cauldron at the shore's edge.

For an interminable time, as it seemed to me, we lay absolutely motionless. The scene is stamped indelibly on my memory—the bulwarks high above me, the steep, sleek deck, the piratical figure tense at the wheel, the snarling water racing from beneath us, the lurid glow to landward crawling up on us inch by inch like a hungry wild beast. Then almost imperceptibly the brave schooner righted. The strained lines on Handy Solomon's carven features relaxed little by little. Thrackles, staring over the side, let out a mighty roar.

"Steerage way," he shouted, and executed an awkward clog dance on the reeling deck.

She moved forward, there was no doubt of that, for gradually we were eating toward the wind—but we made considerable leeway as well. Handy Solomon, taut as the weather rigging, took his little advantages one by one like precious gifts. Light there was none; the land was blotted out by the steam and murk which had crept to sea and now was hurled back by the wind. All we could do was to hang there, tasting the copper of excitement, waiting for these different forces to adjust themselves. Inch by inch we crept forward: foot by foot we made leeway. The intensest of the lava glow worked its way from directly abeam to the quarter. By this we knew we must be nearly opposite the cove. At once a new doubt sprang up in our minds.

A moment ago all the energy of our desires had

gone up in the ambition to avoid being cast on the beach. Now we saw that that was not enough. It was necessary to squeeze around the point where lay the *Golden Horn*, in order to avoid the fate that had overtaken her. Handy Solomon yelled something at us. We could not hear, but our own knowledge told us what it must be, and with one accord we turned to on the foresail. With the peak of it hoisted we moved a trifle faster, though the schooner lay over at a perilous angle. A moment later the fogs parted to show us the cliffs looming startlingly near. There were the donkey engine and the works we had constructed for wrecking—and there beside them, watching us reflectively, stood Percy Darrow.

For ten minutes we stared at him fascinated, during which time the ship laboured against the staggering winds, gained and lost in its buffeting with the great surges. The breakers hurling themselves in wild abandon against the rocks sent their back-wash of tumbling peaks to our very bilges. The few remains of the *Golden Horn*, alternately drenched and draining, seemed to picture to us our inevitable end.

I think we had all selected the same two points for our "bearings," a rock and a drop of the cliff bolder than the ordinary. If the rock opened from the cliff to eastward, we were lost; if it remained stationary, we were at least holding our own; if it opened out to westward, we were saved. We watched with a strained eagerness impossible to describe. At each momentary gain or rebuff we uttered ejaculations. The Nigger mumbled charms. Every once in a while one of us would snatch a glance to leeward at the cruel, white

waters, the whirl of eddies where the sea was beaten, only to hurry back to the rock and the point of the cliff whence our message of safety or destruction was to be flung. Once I looked up. Percy Darrow was leaning gracefully against a stanchion, watching. His soft hat was pulled over his eyes; he stroked softly his little moustache; I caught the white puff of his cigarette. During the moment of my inattention something happened. A wild shout burst from the men. I whirled, and saw to my great joy a strip of sky westward between the cliff and the rock. And at that very instant a billow larger than the ordinary rolled beneath us, and in the back suction of its passage I could dimly make out cruel, dangerous rocks lying almost under our keel.

Slowly we crept away. Our progress seemed infinitesimal, and yet it was real. In a while we had gained sea room; in a while more we were fairly under sailing way, and the cliffs had begun to drop from our quarter. With one accord we looked back. Percy Darrow waved his hand in an indescribably graceful and ironic gesture; then turned square on his heel and sauntered away to the north valley, out of the course of the lava. That was the last I ever saw of him.

As we made our way from beneath the island, the weight of the wind seemed to lessen. We got the foresail on her, then a standing jib; finally little by little all her ordinary working canvas. Before we knew it, we were bowling along under a stiff breeze, and the island was dropping astern.

From a distance it presented a truly imposing sight.

The centre shot intermittent blasts of ruddy light; explosions, deadened by distance, still reverberated strongly; the broad canopy of brown-red, split with lightnings, spread out like a huge umbrella. The lurid gloom that had enveloped us in the atmosphere apparently of a nether world had given place to a twilight. Abruptly we passed from it to a sun-kissed, sparkling sea. The breeze blew sweet and strong; the waves ran untortured in their natural long courses.

At once the men seemed to throw off the superstitious terror that had cowed them. Pulz and Thrackles went to bail the extra dory, alongside, which by a miracle had escaped swamping. The Nigger disappeared in the galley. Perdosa relieved Handy Solomon at the wheel; and Handy Solomon came directly over to me.

XVIII

THE CATASTROPHE

He approached me with a confidence that proclaimed the new leader. A brace of Colt's revolvers swung from his belt, the tatters of his blood-stained garments hung about him.

"Well, here we are," he remarked.

I nodded, waiting for what he had to disclose.

"And lucky for you that you're here at all, say I," he continued. "And now that you're here, w'at are you going to do? That's the question—w'at are you going to do?" He cocked his head sidewise and looked at me speculatively as a cat might look at a rather large mouse. "We been a little rough," he went on after a moment, "and some folks is strait-laced. There might be trouble. And you know a heap too much."

"What do you want of me?" I demanded.

"It's just this," he returned briskly. "If you'll lay us our course to San Salvador, we'll let you go as one of us and no questions asked."

"If not?" I inquired.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I leave it to you."

"There's always the sea," I suggested.

"And it's deep," he agreed.

We looked out to the horizon in a diplomatic silence. I did not know whether to be angry, amused,

or alarmed that the man estimated my cleverness so slightly. Why, the hook was barely concealed, and the bait of the coarsest. That I would go safe to a sight of San Salvador I did not doubt: that I would never enter the harbour I was absolutely certain. The choice offered me was practically whether I preferred being thrown overboard now or several hundred miles to southeastward.

I thought rapidly. It might be possible to announce a daily false reckoning to the crew, to sail the ship within rowing distance of some coast; and then to escape while the men believed themselves many hundred miles at sea. It would take nice calculation to prevent suspicion, but as it was the only chance I resolved upon it immediately.

"That's all very well," I said firmly, "but you can't get anywhere without me, and I'm not going to put in two years and then keep my mouth shut for nothing. I want a share in the swag—an even share with the rest of you."

"Oh, that'll be all right," he cried; "you can have it."

If anything was needed to convince me of the man's sinister intentions, this too ready acquiescence would have been enough. I knew him too well. If he had had the slightest intention of permitting me to go free, he would have bargained.

The Nigger called us to mess. We ate in the after cabin. The chest was locked and the men had as yet been unable to break into it. Pulz professed some skill in locksmithing and promised to experiment later. After mess we went on deck again. The island had

dropped down to the horizon and showed as a brilliant glow under a dark canopy. I leaned over the rail looking at it. Below me the extra dory bumped along. The idea came to me that if I could escape that night, I could row back to Percy Darrow. The two of us could make shift to live on fish and shellfish and mutton. The plan rapidly defined itself in my brain. From the remains of the *Golden Horn* we could construct some kind of a craft in which to run free to the summer trades. Thus we might in time reach some one or another of the Sandwich Islands, whence a passing trader could take us back to civilisation. There were many elements of uncertainty in the scheme, but it seemed to me less desperate than trusting to the caprices of these men, especially since they now had free access to the liquor stores.

While I leaned over the rail engrossed in these thoughts, one of the black thunder clouds that had been gathering and dissipating over the island during the entire afternoon suddenly glowed overhead with a strange white incandescence startlingly akin to Darrow's so-called "devil fires." Strangely enough, this illumination, unlike the volcanic glows, appeared to be cast on the clouds from without rather than shot through them from within, as were the other volcanic emanations. At the same instant I experienced a sharp interior revulsion of some sort, most briefly momentary, but of a character that shook me from head to toe.

I had no time to analyse these various impressions, however, for my attention was almost instantly distracted. From the cabin came the sound of a sharp

fall, then a man cried out, and on the heels of it Pulz darted from the cabin, screaming horribly. We were all on deck, and as the little man rushed toward the stern Handy Solomon twisted him deftly from his feet.

"My God, mate, what is it?" he cried, as he pinned the sufferer to the deck.

But Pulz could not answer. He shivered, stiffened, and lay rigid, his eyes rolled back.

"Fits," remarked Thrackles impatiently.

The excitement died. Rum was forced between the victim's lips. After a little he recovered, but could tell us nothing of his seizure.

After the dishes had been swept aside from supper, Handy Solomon announced a second attempt to open the chest.

"Pancho, here, says he's been a mechanic," said he. "I right well know he's been a housebreaker. So he's got the *sabe* for the job, and you can kiss the Book on that."

Perdosa, with a grin, leaned over the cover from behind and began to pick away at the lock with a long, crooked wire. The others drew close about. I slipped nearer the door, imagining that in their riveted interest I saw my opportunity. To my surprise I caught a glimpse of legs disappearing up the companion. I took stock. Pulz had gone on deck.

This surprised me, for I should have thought every man interested enough in the supposed treasure to wish to be present at its uncovering; and it annoyed me still more—the success of my plan demanded a clear deck. However, there was nothing for it now

but to trust that Pulz had wished to visit the fore-castle, and that I might find the afterworks empty.

I paused at the foot of the companion and looked back. A breathlessness of excitement held the pirates in a vise. From above, the hanging lamp threw strong shadows across their faces, bringing out the deep lines, accentuating the dominant passions. With their rags and blood, their unshaven faces, their firearms, their filth, they showed in violent antithesis to the immaculate white of Old Scrubs's cabin, its glittering brass, and its shining leather. I darted up the steps.

The contrast of the starry night with the glare of the cabin lamp dazzled my eyes. I stood stock still for a moment, during which the only sounds audible were the singing of the winds through the rigging, the wash of the sea, and the small, sharp click of Per-dosa's instrument as he worked at the chest.

Presently I could see better. I looked forward and aft for Pulz, but could see nothing of him, and had just about concluded that he had gone forward when I happened to glance aloft. There, to my astonishment, I made him out, huddled in silhouette against the stars, close to the main truck. What he was doing there I could not imagine. However, I did not have time to bother my head about him, further than to rejoice that he could not obstruct me.

I should very much have liked to get hold of a rifle and ammunition, or at least to lay in biscuit and water, but for this there was no time. It was not absolutely essential. The dull glow of the island was still visible. I had my pillar of fire and smoke to guide me.

Without further delay I jerked loose the painter and drew the extra dory alongside.

I had proceeded just so far in my movements, when the most extraordinary thing happened. I shall try to tell you of it as accurately as possible, and in the exact order of its occurrence. First a long, straight shaft of white light shot straight up *through* the cabin roof to a great height. It shone through the wooden planks as an ordinary light shines through glass. By contrast the surrounding blackness was thrown into a deeper shade, and yet the shaft itself was so brilliant as almost to scotch the sight. Curiously enough, it was defined accurately, being exactly in shape like one of the rectangular tin air-shafts you see so often in city hotels. At the instant of its appearance, the wind fell quite calm.

Almost immediately the rectangle on the roof through which the light made its passage began to splay out, like lighted oil, although the column retained still the integrity of its outline. The fire, if such it could be called, ran with incredible rapidity along the seams between the planks, forward and aft, until the entire deck was sketched like a pyrotechnic display in thin, vivid lines of incandescence. From each of these lines then the fire began again to spread, as though soaking through the planks.

All took place practically in an instant of time. I had no opportunity to move nor to cry out; indeed, my perceptions were inadequate to the task of mere observation. Up to now there had been no sound. The wind had fallen; the waters passed unnoticed. A stillness of death seemed to have descended on the ship. It

was broken by a sharp double report, one as of the fall of a metallic substance, the other caused by the body of Pulz, which, shaken loose from the truck by a heavy roll, smashed against the rail of the ship and splashed overboard. Someone cried out sharply. An instant later the entire crew struggled out from the companionway, rushed in grim silence to the side of the vessel, and threw themselves into the sea.

My own ideas were somewhat confused. The fire had practically enveloped the ship. I thought to feel it; and yet my skin was cool to the touch. The ship's outlines became blurred. A dizziness overtook me; and then all at once a great desire seized and shook my very soul. I cannot tell you the vehemence of this desire. It was a madness; nothing could stand in the way of its gratification. Whatever happened, I must have water. It was not thirst, nor yet a purpose to allay the very real physical burning of which I was now dimly conscious; but a craving for the liquid itself as something apart from and unconnected with anything else. Without hesitation, and as though it were the most natural thing in the world, I vaulted the rail to cast myself into the ocean. I dimly remember a last flying impression of a furnace of light, then a great shock thudded through me, and I lost consciousness.

PART THREE

THE MAROON

I

IN THE WARDROOM

OVER the wardroom of the *Wolverine* had fallen a silence. It held after Slade had finished. Captain Parkinson, stiff and erect in his chair, staring fixedly at a spot two feet above the reporter's head, seemed to weigh, as a judge weighs, the facts so picturesquely set forth. Dr. Trendon, his sturdy frame half in shadow, had slouched far down into himself. Only the regard of his keen eyes fixed upon Slade's face, unwaveringly and a bit anxiously, showed that he was thinking of the narrator as well as of the narrative. The others had fallen completely under the spell of the tale. They sat, as children in a theatre, absorbed, forgetful of the world around them, wrapped in a more vivid element. At the close, they stirred and blinked, half dazed by the abrupt fall of the curtain.

Slade had told his story with fire, with something of passion, even. Now he felt the sharp reflex. He muttered uncertainly beneath his breath and glanced from one to another of the circled faces.

"That's all," he said unsteadily.

There passed through the group a stir and a murmur. Someone broke into sharp coughing. Chairs, shoved back, grated on the floor.

"Well, of all the extraordinary——" began a voice, ruminatingly, and broke short off, as if abashed at its own infraction of the silence.

"That's all," repeated Slade, a note of insistence in his voice. "Why don't you say something? Confound you, why don't you say something?" His speech rose husky and cracked. "Don't you believe it?"

"Hold on," said the surgeon quietly. "No need to get excited."

"Oh, well," muttered the reporter, with a sudden lapse. "Possibly you think I'm romancing. It doesn't matter. I don't suppose I'd believe it myself, in your place."

"But we're heading for the island," suggested Forsythe.

"That's so," cried Slade. "Well, that's all right. Believe or disbelieve as much as you like. Only get Percy Darrow off that island. Then we'll have his version. There are a few things I want to find out about, myself."

"There are several that promise to be fairly interesting," said Forsythe, under his breath.

Slade turned to the captain. "Have you any questions to put to me, sir?" he asked formally.

"Just one moment," interrupted Trendon. "Boy, a pony of brandy for Mr. Slade."

The reporter drank the liquor and again turned to Captain Parkinson.

"Only about our men," said the commanding officer, after a little thought.

Slade shook his head.

"I'm sorry I can't help you there, sir."

"Dr. Trendon said that you knew nothing about Edwards."

"Edwards?" repeated Slade inquiringly. His mind, still absorbed in the events which he had been relating, groped backward.

Trendon came to his aid. "Barnett asked you about him, you remember. It was when you recovered consciousness. Our ensign. Took over charge of the *Laughing Lass*."

"Oh, of course. I was a little dazed, I fancy."

"We put Mr. Edwards aboard when we first picked up the deserted schooner," explained the captain.

"Pardon me," said the other. "My head doesn't seem to work quite right yet. Just a moment, please." He sat silent, with closed eyes. "You say you picked up the *Laughing Lass*. When?" he asked presently.

"Four—five—six days ago, the first time."

"Then you put out the fire."

The circle closed in on Slade, with an unconscious hitching forward of chairs. He had fixed his eyes on the captain. His mouth worked. Obviously he was under a tensy of endeavour in keeping his faculties set to the problem. The surgeon watched him, frowning.

"There was no fire," said the captain.

Slade leaped in his chair. "No fire! But I saw her, I tell you. When I went overboard she was one living flame!"

"You landed in the small boat. Knocked you senseless," said Trendon. "Concussion of the brain. Idea of flame might have been a retroactive hallucination."

"Retroactive rot," cried the other. "I beg your pardon, Dr. Trendon. But if you'd seen her as I saw her—— Barnett!"

He turned in appeal to his old acquaintance.

"There was no fire, Slade," replied the executive officer gently. "No sign of fire that we could find, except that the starboard rail was blistered."

"Oh, that was from the volcano," said Slade. "That was nothing."

"It was all there was," returned Barnett.

"Just let me run this thing over," said the free lance slowly. "You found the schooner. She wasn't afire. She didn't even seem to have been afire. You put a crew aboard under your ensign, Edwards. Storm separated you from her. You picked her up again deserted. Is that right?"

"Day before yesterday morning."

"Then," cried the other excitedly, "the fire was smouldering all the time. It broke out and your men took to the water."

"Impossible," said Barnett.

"Fiddlesticks!" said the more downright surgeon.

"I hardly think Mr. Edwards would be driven overboard by a fire which did not even scorch his ship," suggested the captain mildly.

"It drove *our* lot overboard," insisted Slade. "Do you think we were a pack of cowards? I tell you, when that hellish thing broke loose, you *had* to go. It wasn't fear. It wasn't pain. It was—— What's the use. You can't explain a thing like that."

"We certainly saw the glow the night Billy Edwards was—disappeared," mused Forsythe.

"And again, night before last," said the captain.

"What's that!" cried Slade. "Where is the *Laughing Lass*?"

"I'd give something pretty to know," said Barnett.

"Isn't she in tow?"

"In tow?" said Forsythe. "No, indeed. We hadn't adequate facilities for towing her. Didn't you tell him, Mr. Barnett?"

"Where is she, then?" Slade fired the question at them like a cross-examiner.

"Why, we shipped another crew under Ives and McGuire that noon. We were parted again, and haven't seen them since."

"God forgive you!" said the reporter. "After the warnings you'd had, too. It was—it was——"

"My orders, Mr. Slade," said Captain Parkinson, with quiet dignity.

"Of course, sir. I beg your pardon," returned the other. "But—you say you saw the light again?"

"The first night they were out," said Barnett, in a low voice.

"Then your second crew is with your first crew," said Slade, shakily. "And they're with Thrackles, and Pulz and Solomon, and many another black-hearted scoundrel and brave seaman. Down there!"

He pointed under foot. Captain Parkinson rose and went to his cabin. Slade rose, too, but his knees were unsteady. He tottered, and but for the swift aid of Barnett's arm, would have fallen.

"Overdone," said Dr. Trendon, with some irritation. "Cost you something in strength. Foolish performance. Turn in now."

Slade tried to protest, but the surgeon would not hear of it, and marched him incontinently to his

berth. Returning, Trendon reported, with growls of discontent, that his patient was in a fever.

"Couldn't expect anything else," he fumed. "Pack of human interrogation points hounding him all over the place."

"What do you think of his story?" asked Forsythe.

The grizzled surgeon drew out a cigar, lighted it, took three deliberate puffs, turned it about, examined the ash end with concentration, and replied:

"Man's telling a straight story."

"You think it's all true?" cried Forsythe.

"Humph!" grunted the other. "*He* thinks it's all true."

An orderly appeared and knocked at the captain's cabin.

"Beg pardon, sir," they heard him say. "Mr. Carter would like to know how close in to run. Volcano's acting up pretty bad, sir."

Captain Parkinson went on deck, followed by the rest.

II

THE JOLLY ROGER

FEELING the way forward, the cruiser was soon caught in a maze of cross currents. Hither and thither she was borne, a creature bereft of volition. Order followed order like the rattle of quick-fire, and was obeyed with something more than the *Wolverine's* customary smartness. From the bridge Captain Parkinson himself directed his ship. His face was placid: his bearing steady and confident. This in itself was sufficient earnest that the cruiser was in ticklish case. For it was an axiom of the men who sailed under Parkinson that the calmer that nervous man grew, the more cause was there for nervousness on the part of others.

The approach was from the south, but suspicious aspects of the water had fended the cruiser out and around, until now she stood prow-on to a bold headland at the northwest corner of the island. Above this headland lay a dark pall of vapour. In the shifting breeze it swayed sluggishly, heavily, as if riding at anchor like a logy ship of the air. Only once did it show any marked movement.

"It's spreading out toward us," said Barnett to his fellow officers, gathered aft.

"Time to move, then," grunted Trendon.

The others looked at him inquiringly.

"About as healthful as prussic acid, those volcanic gases," explained the surgeon.

The ship edged on and inward. Presently the sing-song of the leadsman sounded in measured distinctness through the silence. Then a sudden activity and bustle forward, the rattle of chains, and the *Wolverine* was at anchor. The captain came down from the bridge.

"What do you think, Dr. Trendon?" he asked.

More explicit inquiry was not necessary.

The surgeon understood what was in his superior's mind.

"Never can tell about volcanoes, sir," he said.

"Of course," agreed the captain. "But—well, do you recognise any of the symptoms?"

"Want me to diagnose a case of earthquake, sir?" grinned Trendon. "She might go off to-day, or she might behave herself for a century."

"Well, it's all chance," said the other, cheerfully.

"The man *might* be alive. At any rate we must do our best on that theory. What do you make of that cloud on the peak?"

"Poisonous vapours, I suppose. Thought we'd have a chance to make sure just now. Seemed to be coming right for us. Wind's shifted it since."

"There couldn't be anything alive up there?"

"Not so much as a bug," replied the doctor positively.

"Yet I thought when the vapour lifted a bit that I saw something moving."

"When was that, sir?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes back."

"We'll see soon enough, sir," put in Forsythe.
"The wind is driving it down to the south'ard."

Sullenly, reluctantly, the forbidding mass moved across the headland. All glasses were bent upon it. Without taking his binocular from his eyes, Trendon began to ruminate aloud.

"If he could have got to the beach. . . . No vapour there. . . . Signal, though. . . . Perhaps he hadn't time. . . . And I'd hate to risk good men on that hell's cauldron. . . . Just as much risk here, perhaps. Only it seems——"

"There it is," cried Forsythe. "Look. The highest point."

Dull, gray wisps of murk, the afterguard of the gaseous cloud, were twisting and spiraling in a witch-dance across the landscape, and, seen by snatches and glimpses through it, something flapped darkly in the breeze. Suddenly the veil parted and fled. A flag stood forth in the sharp gust, rigid, and appalling. It was black.

"The *Jolly Roger*, by God! They've come back!" exclaimed Forsythe.

"And set up the sign of their shop," added Barnett.

"If they stuck to their flag—good-bye," observed Trendon grimly.

"Dr. Trendon," said Captain Parkinson, "you will arm yourself and go with me in the gig to make a landing."

"Yes, sir," responded the surgeon.

"Mr. Barnett."

"Yes, sir."

"Should we be overtaken by the vapour while on the highland and be unable to get back to the beach, you are to send no rescuing party up there until the air has cleared."

"But, sir, may we not——"

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"In case of an attack you will at once send in another boat with a howitzer."

"Yes, sir."

"Dr. Trendon, will you see Mr. Slade and inquire of him the best point for landing?"

Trendon hesitated.

"I suppose it would hardly do to take him with us?" pursued the commanding officer.

"If he is roused now, even for a moment, I won't answer for the consequences, sir," said the surgeon bluntly.

"Surely you can have him point out a landing place," said the captain.

"On your responsibility," returned the other, obstinately. "He's under opiate now."

"Be it so," said Captain Parkinson, after a time.

Going in, they saw no sign of life along the shore. Even the birds had deserted it. For the time the volcano seemed to have pretermitted its activity. Now and again there was a spurtle of smoke from the cone, followed by subterranean growlings, but, on the whole, the conditions were reassuring.

"Penny-pop-pinwheel of a volcano, anyhow," remarked Trendon, disparagingly. "Real man-size erup-

tion would have wiped the whole thing off the map, first whack."

As they drew in, it became apparent that they must scale the cliff from the boat. Farther to the south opened out a wide cove that suggested easy beaching, but over it hung a cloud of steam.

"Lava pouring down," said Trendon.

Fortunately at the point where the cliff looked easiest the seas ran low. Ropes had been brought. After some dainty manœuvring two of the sailors gained foothold and slung the ropes so that the remainder of the disembarcation was simple. Nor was the ascent of the cliff a harsh task. Half an hour after the landing the exploring party stood on the summit of the hill, where the black flag waved over a scene of utter desolation. The vegetation was withered to pallid rags: even the tiniest weedling in the rock crevices had been poisoned by the devastating blast.

In the midst of that deathly scene, the flag seemed instinct with a sinister liveliness. Whoever had set it there had accurately chosen the highest available point on that side of the island, the spot of all others where it would make good its signal to the eye of any chance farer upon those shipless seas. For the staff a ten-foot sapling, finely polished, served. A mound of rock-slabs supported it firmly. Upon the cloth itself was no design. It was of a dull black, the hue of soot. Captain Parkinson, standing a few yards off, viewed it with disfavour.

"Furl that flag," he ordered.

Congdon, the coxswain of the gig, stepped forward and began to work at the fastenings. Presently he

turned a grinning face to the captain, who was scanning the landscape through his glass.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Captain Parkinson.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, that ain't rightly no flag. That's what you might rightly call a garment, sir. It's an undershirt, beggin' your pardon."

"Black undershirt's a new one to me," muttered Trendon.

"No, sir. It ain't rightly black, look."

Wrenching the object from its fastenings, he flapped it violently. A cloud of sooty dust, beaten out, spread about his face. With a strangled cry the sailor cast the shirt from him and rolled in agony upon the ground.

"You fool!" cried Trendon. "Stand back, all of you."

Opening his medicine case, he bent over the racked sufferer. Presently the man sat up, pale and abashed.

"That's how poisonous volcanic gas is," said the surgeon to his commanding officer. "Only inhaled remnants of the dust, too."

"An ill outlook for the man we're seeking," the captain mused.

"Dead if he's anywhere on this highland," declared Trendon. "Let's look at his flag-pole."

He examined the staff. "Came from the beach," he pronounced. "Waterworn. H'm! Maybe he ain't so dead, either."

"I don't quite follow you, Dr. Trendon."

"Why, I guess our man has figured this thing all out. Brought this pole up from the beach to plant it

here. Why? Because this was the best observation point. No good as a permanent residence, though. Planted his flag and went back."

"Why didn't we see him on the beach, then?"

"Did you notice a cave around to the north? Good refuge in case of fumes."

"It's worth trying," said the captain, putting up his glass.

"Hold on, sir. What's this? Here's something. Look here."

Trendon pointed to a small bit of wood rather neatly carved to the shape of an indicatory finger, and lashed to the staff, at the height of a man's face. The others clustered around.

"Oh, the devil!" cried Trendon. "It must have got twisted. It's pointing straight down."

"Strange performance," said the captain. "However, since it points that way—heave aside those rocks, men."

The first slab lifted brought to light a corner of cardboard. This, on closer examination, proved to be the cover of a book. The rocks rolled right and left, and as the flag-staff, deprived of its support, tottered and fell, the trove was dragged forth and handed to the captain. While the ground jarred with occasional tremors and the mountain puffed forth its vaporous threats, he and the surgeon, seated on a rock, gave themselves with complete absorption to the reading.

III

THE CACHE

OUTWARDLY the book accorded ill with its surroundings. In that place of desolation and death, it typified the petty neatness of office processes. Properly placed, it should have been found on a desk, with pens, rulers, and other paraphernalia forming exact angles or parallels to it. It was a quarto, bound in marbled paper, with black leather over the hinges. No external label suggested its ownership or uses, but through one corner, blackened and formidable in its contrast to the peaceful purposes of the volume, a hole had been bored. The agency of perforation was obvious. A bullet had made it.

"Seen something of life, I reckon," said Trendon, as the captain turned the volume about slowly in his hands.

"And of death," returned Captain Parkinson solemnly. "Do you know, Trendon, I almost dread to open this."

"Pshaw!" returned the other. "What is it to us?"

He threw the cover back. Neatly lettered on the inside, in the fine and slightly angular writing characteristic of the Teutonic scholar, was the legend:

*Karl Augustus Schermerhorn,
1409½ Spruce Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.*

The opposite page was blank. Captain Parkinson turned half a dozen leaves.

"German!" he cried, in a note of disappointment, "Can you read German script?"

"After a fashion," replied the other. "Let's see. *Es wonnte sechs—und—dreissig unterjacke*," he read. "Why, blast it, was the man running a haberdashery? What have three dozen undershirts to do with this?"

"A memorandum for outfitting, probably," suggested the captain. "Try here."

"Chemical formulæ," said Trendon. "Pages of 'em. The devil! Can't make a thing of it."

"Well, here's something in English."

"Good," said the other. "*By combining the hyper-sulphate of iridium with the fumes arising from oxide of copper heated to 1000 C. and combining with picric acid in the proportions described in formula x 18, a reaction, the nature of which I have not fully determined, follows. This must be performed with extreme care owing to the unstable nature of the benzene compounds.*"

"Picric acid? Benzene compounds? Those are high explosives," said Captain Parkinson. "We should have Barnett go over this."

"Here's a name under the formula. *Dr. A. Mardenter, Ann Arbor, Mich.* That explains its being in English. Probably copied from a letter."

"This must have been one of the experiments in the valley that Slade told us of," said the captain, thoughtfully. "Why, see here," he cried, with something like exultation. "That's what Dr. Schermerhorn was doing here. He has the clue to some ex-

plosive so terrific that he goes far out of the world to experiment with its manufacture. For companions he chooses a gang of cutthroats that the world would never miss in case anything went wrong. Possibly it was some trial of the finished product that started the eruption, even. Do you see?"

"Don't explain enough," grunted Trendon. "Deserted ship. Billy Edwards. Mysterious lights. Slade and his story. Any explosives in those? Good enough, far as it goes. Don't go far enough."

"It certainly leaves gaps," admitted the other.

He turned over a few more pages.

"Formulæ, formulæ, formulæ. What's this? Here are some marginal annotations."

"*Unbehasslich*," read Trendon. "Let's see. That means 'highly unsatisfactory,' or words to that effect. Hi! Here's where the old man loses his temper. Listen: '*May the devil take Carroll and Crum for careless*'—h'm—well, '*pig-dogs*.' Now, where do Carroll and Crum come in?"

"They're a firm of analytical chemists in Washington," said the captain. "When I was on the ordnance board I used to get their circulars."

"Fits in. What? More English? Worse than the German, this is."

The writing, beginning evenly enough at the top of a page, ran along for a line or two, then fell, sprawling in huge, ragged characters the full length. Trendon stumbled among them, indignantly.

"June 1, 1904," he read. "*It is done. Triumph.* (German word.) *Eureka. Es ist gefüllt. From the* (can't make out that word) *of the inspiration—god-*

like power—solution of the world-problems. Why, the old fool is crazy! And his writing is crazier. Can't make head or tail of it."

The captain turned several more pages. They were blank. "At any rate, it seems to be the end," he said.

"I should hope so," returned the other, disgustedly.

He took the book on his knees, fluttering the leaves between thumb and finger. Suddenly he checked, cast back, and threw the book wide open.

"Here beginneth a new chapter," said he, quietly.

No imaginable chirography could have struck the eye with more of contrast to the professor's small and nervous hand. Large, rounded, and rambling, it filled the page with few and careless words.

June 2, 1904. On this date I find myself sole occupant and absolute monarch of this valuable island. This morning I was a member of a community, interesting if not precisely peaceful. To-night I am the last leaf. 'All his lovely companions are faded and gone,' the sprightly Solomon, the psychic Nigger, the amiable Thrackles, the cheerful Perdosa, the genial Pulz, and the high-minded Eagen. Undoubtedly the social atmosphere has cleared; moreover, I am for the first time in my life a landed proprietor. Item: several square miles of grass land; item: several dozen head of sheep; item: a cove full of fish; item: a handsomely decorated cave; item: a sportive though somewhat unruly volcano. At times, it may be, I shall feel the lack of company. The seagulls alone are not distrustful of me. Undoubtedly the seagull is an estimable creature, but he leaves something to be desired in the way of companionship. Hence this diary, the inevitable refuge

of the empty-minded. Materially, I shall do well enough, though I face one tragic circumstance. My cigarette material, I find, is short. Upon counting up——"

"Damn his cigarettes!" cried the surgeon. "This must be Darrow. Finicky beast! Let's see if it's signed."

He whirled the leaves over to the last sheet, glanced at it, and sprang to his feet. There, sprawled in tremulous characters, as by a hand shaken with agony or terror, was written:

Look for me in the cave.

Percy Darrow.

The bullet hole in the corner furnished a sinister period to the signature.

Trendon handed the ledger back to the captain, who took one quick look, closed it, and handed it to Congdon.

"Wrap that up and carry it carefully," he said.

"Aye, aye, sir," said the coxswain, swathing it in his jacket and tucking it under his arm.

"Now to find that cave," said Captain Parkinson to the surgeon.

"The cave in the cliff, of course," said Trendon. "Noticed it coming in, you know."

"Where?"

"On the north shore, about a mile to the east of here."

"Then we'll cut directly across."

"Beg your pardon, sir," put in Congdon, "but I don't think we can make it from this side, sir."

"Why not?"

"No beach, sir, and the cliff's like the side of a ship. Looks to be deep water right into the cave's mouth."

"Back to the boat, then. Bring that flag along."

The descent was swift, at times reckless, but the party embarked without accident. Soon they were forging through the water at racing speed, the boat leaping to the impulsion of the sailorman's strongest motives, curiosity and the hope of saving a life.

IV

THE TWIN SLABS

WITHIN half an hour the gig had reached the mouth of the cave. As the coxswain had predicted, the seas ran into the lofty entrance. Elsewhere the surf fell whitely, but through the arch the waves rolled unbroken into a heavy stillness. Only as the boat hovered for a moment at the face of the cliff could the exploring party hear, far within, the hollow boom that told of breakers on a distant, subterranean beach.

"Run her in easy," came the captain's order. "Keep a sharp lookout for hidden rocks."

To the whispering splash of the oars they moved from sunlight into twilight, from twilight into darkness. Of a sudden the oars jerked convulsively. A great roar had broken upon the ears of the sailors; the invisible roof above them, the water heaving beneath them, the walls that hemmed them in, called, with a multiplication of resonance, upon the name of Darrow. The boat quivered with the start of its occupants. Then one or two laughed weakly as they realised that what they had heard was no supernatural voice. It was the captain hailing for the marooned man.

No vocal answer came. But an indeterminable space away they could hear a low splash followed by a second and a third. Something coughed weakly in

front and to the right. Trendon's hand went to his revolver. The men sat, stiffened. One of them swore, in a whisper, and the oath came back upon them, echoing the name of the Saviour in hideous sibilance.

"Silence in the boat," said the captain, in such buoyant tones that the men braced themselves against the expected peril.

"Light the lantern and pass it to me," came the order. "Keep below the gunwale, men."

As the match spluttered: "Do you see something, a few rods to port?" asked the captain in Trendon's ear.

"Pair of green lights," said Trendon. "Eyes. *Seals!*"

"*Seals! Seals! Seals!*" shouted the walls, for the surgeon had suddenly released his voice. And as the mockery boomed, the green lights disappeared and there was more splashing from the distance. The crew sat up again.

The lantern spread its radiance. It was reflected from battlements of fairy beauty. Everywhere the walls were set, as with gems, in broad wales of varied and vivid hues. Dazzled at first, the explorers soon were able to discern the general nature of the subterranean world which they had entered. In most places the walls rose sheer and unscaleable from the water. In others, turretted rocks thrust their gleaming crags upward. Over to starboard a little beach shone with Quaker greyness in that spectacular display. The end of the cavern was still beyond the area of light.

"Must have been a swimmer to get in here," commented Trendon, glancing at the walls.

"Unless he had a boat," said the captain. "But why doesn't he answer?"

"Better try again. No telling how much more there is of this."

The surgeon raised his ponderous bellow, and the cave roared again with the summons. Silence, formidable and unbroken, succeeded.

"House to house search is now in order," he said. "Must be in here somewhere—unless the seals got him."

Cautiously the boat moved forward. Once she grazed on a half submerged rock. Again a tiny islet loomed before her. Scattered bones glistened on the rocky shore, but they were not human relics. Occasional beaches tempted a landing, but all of these led back to precipitous cliffs except one, from the side of which opened two small caves. Into the first the lantern cast its glare, revealing emptiness, for the arch was wide and the cave shallow. The entrance to the other was so narrow as to send a visitor to his knees. But inside it seemed to open out. Moreover, there were fish bones at the entrance. The captain, the surgeon, and Congdon, the coxswain, landed. Captain Parkinson reached the spot first. Stooping, he thrust his head in at the orifice. A sharp exclamation broke from him. He rose to his feet, turning a contorted face to the others.

"Poisonous," he cried.

"More volcano," said Trendon. He bent to the black hole and sniffed cautiously.

"I'll go in, sir," volunteered Congdon. "I've had fire-practice."

"My business," said Trendon, briefly. "Decomposition; unpleasant, but not dangerous."

Pushing the lantern before him, he wormed his way until the light was blotted out. Presently it shone forth from the funnel, showing that the explorer had reached the inner open space. Captain Parkinson dropped down and peered in, but the evil odour was too much for him. He retired, gagging and coughing. Trendon was gone for what seemed an interminable time. His superior officer fidgetted uneasily. At last he could stand it no longer.

"Dr. Trendon, are you all right?" he shouted.

"Yup," answered a choked voice. "Cubbing oud dow."

Again the funnel was darkened. A pair of feet appeared; then the surgeon's chunky trunk, his head, and the lantern. Once, twice, and thrice he inhaled deeply.

"Phew!" he gasped. "Thought I was tough, but —Phee-ee-ee-ew!"

"Did you find——"

"No, sir. Not Darrow. Only a poor devil of a seal that crawled in there to die."

The exploration continued. Half a mile, as they estimated, from the open, they reached a narrow beach, shut off by a perpendicular wall of rock. Skirting this, they returned on the other side, minutely examining every possible crevice. When they again reached the light of day, they had arrived at the certain conclusion that no living man was within those walls.

"Would a corpse rise to the surface soon in waters such as these, Dr. Trendon?" asked the captain.

"Might, sir. Might not. No telling that."

The captain ruminated. Then he beat his fist on his knee.

"The other cave!"

"What other cave?" asked the surgeon.

"The cave where they killed the seals."

"Surely!" exclaimed Trendon. "Wait, though. Didn't Slade say it was between here and the point?"

"Yes. Beyond the small beach."

"No cave there," declared the surgeon positively.

"There must be. Congdon, did you see an opening anywhere in the cliff as we came along?"

"No, sir. This is the only one, sir."

"We'll see about that," said the captain, grimly.

"Head her about. Skirt the shore as near the breakers as you safely can."

The gig retraced its journey.

"There's the beach, as Slade described it," said Captain Parkinson, as they came abreast of the little reach of sand.

"And what are those two bird-roosts on it?" asked Trendon. "See 'em? Dead against that patch of shoreweed."

"Bits of wreckage fixed in the sand."

"Don't think so, sir. Too well matched."

"We have no time to settle the matter now," said the captain impatiently. "We must find that cave, if it is to be found."

Hovering just outside the final drag of the surf, under the skilful guidance of Congdon, the boat moved slowly along the line of beach to the line of cliff. All was open as the day. The blazing sun picked out each detail of jut and hollow. Evidently the

poisonous vapours from the volcano had not spread their blight here, for the face of the precipice was bright with many flowers. So close in moved the boat that its occupants could even see butterflies fluttering above the bloom. But that which their eager eyes sought was still denied them. No opening offered in that smiling cliff-side. Not by so much as would admit a terrier did the mass of rock and rubble gape.

"And Slade described the cave as big enough to ram the *Wolverine* into," muttered Trendon.

Up to the point of the headland, and back, passed the boat. Blank disappointment was the result.

"What is your opinion now, Dr. Trendon?" asked the captain of the older man.

"Don't know, sir," answered the surgeon hopelessly.

"Looks as if the cave might have been a hallucination."

"I shall have something to say to Mr. Slade on our return," said the captain crisply. "If the cave was an hallucination, as you suggest, the seal-murder was fiction."

"Looks so," agreed the other.

"And the murder of the captain. How about that?"

"And the mutiny of the men," added the surgeon.

"And the killing of the doctor. Your patient seems to be a romantic genius."

"And the escape of Darrow. Hold hard," quoth Trendon. "Darrow's no romance. Nothing fictional about the flag and ledger."

"True enough," said the captain, and fell to consideration.

"Anyway," said Trendon vigorously, "I'd like to have a look at those bird-roosts. Mighty like sign-posts, to my mind."

"Very well," said the captain. "It'll cost us only a wetting. Run her in, Congdon."

With all the coxswain's skill, and the oarsmen's technique, the passage of the surf was a lively one, and little dribblets of water marked the trail of the officers as they shuffled up the beach.

The two slabs stood less than fifty yards beyond high water tide. Nearing them, the visitors saw that each marked a mound, but not until they were close up could they read the neat carving on the first. It ran as follows:

Here lies

SOLOMON ANDERSON

alias

HANDY SOLOMON

*who murdered his employer,
his captain, and his ship-
mates, and was found, dead
of his deserts, on these shores,
June 5, 1904.*

*This slab is erected as a
memento of admiring esteem
by
the last of his victims.*

*"And you can kiss the
Book on that."*

"Percy Darrow *fecit*," said the surgeon. "You can kiss the Book on *that*, too."

"Then Slade was telling the truth!"



The finding of the two slabs

"Apparently. Seems good corroboration."

The captain turned to the other mound. Its slab was carved by the same hand.

*Sacred to the memory of an
Ensign of the U. S. Navy,
whose body, washed upon this
coast, is here buried with all
reverence, by strange hands;
whose soul may God rest.
"The seas shall sing his
requiem." June the Sixth,
MXMIV.*

"Billy Edwards," said the captain, very low.

He uncovered. The surgeon did likewise. So, for a space, they stood with bared heads between the twin graves.

V

THE PINWHEEL VOLCANO

THE surgeon spoke first.

"Another point," said he. "Darrow was alive within a few days."

Captain Parkinson turned slowly away from the grave. "You are right," he said, with an effort. "Our business is with the living now. The dead must wait."

"Hide and seek," growled Trendon. "If he's here why don't he show himself?"

The other shook his head.

"Place is all trampled up with his footprints," said Trendon. "He's plodded back and forth like a prisoner in a cell."

"The ledger," said the captain. "I'd forgotten it. That grave drove everything else out of my mind."

"Bring the book here," called Trendon.

Congdon unwrapped it from his jacket and handed it to him. The sailors cast curious glances at the two headstones.

"Mount guard over Mr. Edwards's grave," commanded the captain.

The coxswain saluted and gave an order. One of the sailors stepped forward to the first mound.

"Not that one," rasped the officer. "The other."

The man saluted and moved on.

"With your permission, sir," said Trendon.

On a nod from his superior officer he opened the ledger and took up Darrow's record.

"Here it is. Entry of June 3d."

"Everything lovely. Schooner lost to sight. Query—to memory dear? Not exactly. Though I shouldn't mind having her under orders for a few days. Queer glow in the sky last night: if they've been investigating they may have got what's coming to them. Volcano exhibiting fits of temper. Spouted out considerable fire about nine o'clock. Quite spectacular, but no harm done. Can foresee short rations of tobacco. Lava in valley still too hot for comfort. No sign of Dr. Schermerhorn. Still sleep on beach.

"Not much there," sniffed Trendon.

"Go on," said the captain.

"June 3. Evening. Thick and squally weather again. Local atmospheric conditions seem upset. Volcano still leading strenuous life. Climbed the headland this afternoon. Wind very shifty. Got an occasional whiff of volcanic output. One in particular would have sent a skunk to the camphor bottle. No living on the headland. Will explore cave to-morrow with a view to domicile. Have come down to an allowance of seven cigarettes per diem.

"June 4. Explored cave to-day. Full of dead seals. Not only dead, but all bitten and cut to pieces. Must have been lively doings in Seal-Town. Not much choice between air in the cave and vapours from the volcano. Barring seals, everything suitable for light housekeeping, such as mine. Undertook to clean house. Dragged late lamented out into the water. Some sank and were swept

away by the sea-puss. Others, I regret to say, floated. Found trickle of fresh water in depth of cave, and little sand-ledge to sleep on. So far, so good: we may be 'appy yet. If only I had my cigarette supply. Once heard a botanist say that leaves of the white shore-willow made fair substitute for tobacco. Fair substitute for nux vomica! Would like to interview said botanist.

"The fellow is a tobacco maniac," growled Trendon, feeling in his breast pocket. "The devil," he cried, bringing forth an empty hand.

Silently the captain handed him a cigar. "Thank you, sir," he said, lighted it, and continued reading.

"June 5. Had a caller to-day. Climbed the headland this morning. Found volcano taking a day off. Looking for sign of Laughing Lass, noticed something heliographing to me from the waves beyond the reef. Seemed to be metal. I guessed a tin can. Caught in the swirl, it rounded the cape, and I came down to the shore to meet it. Halfway down the cliff I had a better view. I saw it was not a tin can. There was a dark body under it, which the waves were tossing about, and as the metal moved with the body, it glinted in the sun. Suddenly it was borne in upon me that an arm was doing the signalling, waving to me with a sprightly, even a jocular friendliness. Then I saw what it really was. It was Handy Solomon and his steel hook. He was riding quite high. Every now and again he would bow and wave. He grounded gently on the sand beach. I planted him promptly. First, however, I removed a bag of tobacco from his pocket. Poor stuff, and water soaked, but still tobacco. Spent a quiet afternoon carving a headstone for the dear departed. Pity it were that virtues so shin-

ing should be uncommemorated. Idle as the speculation is, I wonder who my next visitor will be. Thrackles, I hope. Evidently some of them have been playing the part of Pandora. Spent last night in the cave. Air quite fresh.

"June 6. Saw the glow again last night.

The surgeon paused in his reading. "That would be the night of the 5th: the night before we picked her up empty."

"Yes," agreed Captain Parkinson. "That was the night Billy Edwards—— Go on."

"Saw the glow again last night. Don't understand it. Once should have been enough for them. This matter of hoarding tobacco may be a sad error. If Old Spitfire keeps on the way she has to-day I shan't need much more. It would be a raw jest to be burned or swallowed up with a month's supply of unsmoked cigarettes on one. Cave getting shaky. Still, I think I'll stick there. As between being burned alive and buried alive, I'm for the respectable and time honoured fashion of interment. Bombardment was mostly to the east to-day, but no telling when it may shift.

"June 7. This morning I found a body rolling in the surf. It was the body of a young man, large and strongly built, dressed in the uniform of an ensign of our navy. Surely a strange visitor to these shores! There was no mark of identification upon him except a cigarette case graven with an undecipherable monogram in Tiffany's most illegible style of arrow-headed inscription. This I buried with him, and staked the grave with a headboard. An officer and a gentleman, a youth of friendly ways and

kindly living, if one may judge by the face of the dead; and he comes by the same end to the same goal as Handy Solomon. Why not? And why should one philosophise in a book that will never be read? Hold on! Perhaps—just perhaps—it may be read. The officer was not long dead. Ensigns of the U. S. navy do not wander about untraversed waters alone. There must be a warship somewhere in the vicinity. But why, then, an unburied officer floating on the ocean? I will smoke upon this, luxuriously and plentifully. (Later.) No use. I can't solve it. But one thing I do. I put up a signal pole on the headland and caché this record under it this afternoon. From day to day, with the kindly permission of the volcano, I will add to it. . . . Bad doings by Old Spitfire. The cloud is coming down on me. Also seems to be moving along the cliff. I will retire hastily to my private estate in the cave.

"That's all, except the scrawl on the last page," said Trendon. "Some action of the volcano scared him off. He just had time to scrawl that last message and drop the book into the cache. The question is, did he get back alive?"

"I doubt it," said the captain. "We will search the headland for his body."

"But the cave," insisted the surgeon. "We ought to have found some sign of him there."

"Slade is the solution," said the captain. "We must ask him."

They put back to the ship. Barnett was anxiously awaiting them.

"Your patient has been in a bad way, Dr. Trendon," he said.

"What's wrong?" asked Trendon, frowning.

"He came up on deck, wild-eyed and staggering. There was a sheet of paper in his hand which seemed to have some bearing on his trouble. When he found you had gone to the island without him he began to rage like a maniac. I had to have him carried down by force. In the rumpus the paper disappeared. I assumed the responsibility of giving him an opiate."

"Quite right," approved Trendon. "I'll go down. Will you come with me, sir?" he said to the captain.

They found Slade in profound slumber.

"Won't do to wake him now," growled Trendon.

"Hello, what's here?"

Lying in the hollow of the sick man's right hand, where it had been crushed to a ball, was a crumpled mass of tracing paper. Trendon smoothed it out, peered at it and passed it to the captain.

"It's a sketch of an Indian arrow-head," he exclaimed in surprise, at the first glance. "What are all these marks?"

"Map of the island," barked Trendon. "Look here."

The drawing was a fairly careful one, showing such geographical points as had been of concern to the two-year inhabitants. There was the large cavern, indicated as they had found it, and at a point between it and the headland the legend, "Seal Cave."

"But it's wrong," cried Captain Parkinson, setting finger to the spot. "We passed there twice. There's no opening."

"No guarantee that there may not have been," returned the other. "This island has been considerably

shaken up lately. Entrance may have been closed by a landslide down the cliff. Noticed signs myself, but didn't think of it in connection with the cave."

"That's work for Barnett, then," said the captain, brightening. "We'll blow up the whole face of the cliff, if necessary, but we'll get at that cave."

He hurried out. Order followed order, and soon the gig, with the captain, Trendon, and the torpedo expert, was driving for the point marked "Seal Cave" on the map over which they were bent.

VI

MR. DARROW RECEIVES

"You say the last entry is June 7th?" asked Barnett, as the boat entered the light surf.

Trendon nodded.

"That was the night we saw the last glow, and the big burst from the volcano, wasn't it?"

"Right."

"The island would have been badly shaken up."

"Not so violently but that the flag-pole stood," said the captain.

"That's true, sir. But there's been a good deal of volcanic gas going. The man's been penned up for four days."

"Give the fellow a chance," growled Trendon.

"Air may be all right in the cave. Good water there, too. Says so himself. By Slade's account he's a pretty capable citizen when it comes to looking after himself. Wouldn't wonder if we'd find him fit as a fiddle."

"There was no clue to Ives and McGuire?" asked Barnett presently.

"None." It was the captain who answered.

The gig grated, and the tide being high, they waded to the base of the cliff, Barnett carrying his precious explosives aloft in his arms.

"Here's the spot," said the captain. "See where the water goes in through those crevices."

"Opening at the top, too," said Trendon.

He let out his bellow, roaring Darrow's name.

"I doubt if you could project your voice far into a cave thus blocked," said Captain Parkinson. "We'll try this."

He drew his revolver and fired. The men listened at the crevices of the rock. No sound came from within.

"Your enterprise, Mr. Barnett," said the commander, with a gesture which turned over the conduct of the affair to the torpedo expert.

Barnett examined the rocks with enthusiasm.

"Looks like moderately easy stuff," he observed. "See how the veins run. You could almost blow a design to order in that."

"Yes; but how about bringing down the whole cave?"

"Oh, of course there's always an element of uncertainty when you're dealing with high explosives," admitted the expert. "But unless I'm mistaken, we can chop this out as neat as with an axe."

Dropping his load of cartridges carelessly upon a flat rock which projected from the water, he busied himself in a search along the face of the cliff. Presently, with an "Ah," of satisfaction, he climbed toward a hand's breadth of platform where grew a patch of purple flowers.

"Throw me up a knife, somebody," he called.

"Take notice," said Trendon, good-naturedly, "that I'm the botanist of this expedition."

"Oh, you can have the flowers. All I want is what they grow in."

Loosening a handful of the dry soil, he brought it

down and laid it with the explosives. Next he called one of the sailors to "boost" him, and was soon perched on the flat slant of a huge rock which formed, as it were, the keystone to the blockade.

"Let's see," he ruminated. "We want a slow charge for this. One that will exert a widespread pressure without much shattering force. The No. 3, I think."

"How is that, Mr. Barnett?" asked the captain, with lively interest.

"You see, sir," returned the demonstrator, perched high, like a sculptor at work on some heroic masterpiece, "what we want is to split off this rock." He patted the flank of the huge slab. "There's a lovely vein running at an angle inward from where I sit. Split that through, and the rock should roll, of its own weight, away from the entrance. It's held only by the upper projection that runs under the arch here."

"Neat programme," commented Trendon, with a tinge of sardonic scepticism.

"Wait and see," retorted Barnett blithely, for he was in his element now. "I'll appoint you my assistant. Just toss me up that cartridge: the third one on the left."

The surgeon recoiled.

"Supposing you don't catch it?"

"Well, supposing I don't."

"It's dynamite, isn't it?"

"Something of the same nature. Joveite, it's called."

Still the surgeon stared at him. Barnett laughed.

"Oh, you've got the high explosives superstition,"

he said lightly. "Dynamite don't go off as easy as people think. You could drop that stuff from the cliff-head without danger. Have I got to come down for it?"

With a wry face Trendon tossed up the package. It was deftly caught.

"Now wet that dirt well. Put it in the canvas bag yonder, and send one of the men up with it. I'm going to make a mud pie."

Breaking the package open, he spread the yellow powder in a slightly curving line along the rock. With the mud he capped this over, forming a little arched roof.

"To keep it from blowing away," surmised Trendon.

"No; to make it blow down instead of blowing up."

"Oh, rot!" returned the downright surgeon. "That pound of dirt won't make the shadow of a feather's difference."

"Won't it!" retorted the other. "Curious thing about high explosives. A mud-cap will hold down the force as well as a ton of rock. Wait and see what happens to the rock beneath."

He slid off his perch into the ankle-deep water and waded out to the boat. Here he burrowed for a moment, presently emerging with a box. This he carried gingerly to a convenient rock and opened. First he lifted out some soft padding. A small tin box honey-combed inside came to light. With infinite precaution Barnett picked out an object that looked like a 22-calibre short cartridge, wadded some cotton batten in his hand, set the thing in the wadding, laid it on the

rock, carefully returned the small box to the large box and the large box to the boat, took up the cartridge again and waded back to the cliff. They watched him in silence.

"This is the little devil," he said, indicating his delicate burden. "Fulminate of mercury. This is the stuff that'll remove your hand with neatness and despatch. It's the quickest tempered little article in the business. Just give it one hard look and it's off."

"Here," said Trendon, "I resign. From now on I'm a spectator."

Barnett swung the fulminate in his handkerchief and gave it to a sailor to hold. The man dandled it like a new-born infant. Back to his rock went Barnett. Producing some cord, he let down an end.

"Tie the handkerchief on, and get out of the way," he directed.

With painful slowness the man carried out the first part of the order; the latter half he obeyed with sprightly alacrity. Very slowly, very delicately, the expert drew in his dangerous burden. Once a current of air puffed it against the face of the rock, and the operator's head was hastily withdrawn. Nothing happened. Another minute and he had the tiny shell in hand. A fuse was fixed in it and it was shoved under the mud-cap. Barnett stood up.

"Will you kindly order the boat ready, Captain Parkinson?" he called.

The order was given.

"As soon as I light the fuse I will come down and we'll pull out fifty yards. Leave the rest of the Joveite where it is. All ready? Here goes."

He touched a match to the fuse. It caught. For a moment he watched it.

"Going all right," he reported, as he struck the water. "Plenty of time."

Some seventy yards out they rested on their oars. They waited. And waited. And waited.

"It's out," grunted Trendon.

From the face of the cliff puffed a cloud of dust. A thudding report boomed over the water. Just a wisp of whitish-grey smoke arose, and beneath it the great rock, with a gapping seam across its top, rolled majestically outward, sending a shower of spray on all sides, and opening to their eager view a black chasm into the heart of the headland. The experiment had worked out with the accuracy of a geometric problem.

"That's all, sir," Barnett reported officially.

"Magic! Modern magic!" said the captain. He stared at the open door. For the moment the object of the undertaking was forgotten in the wonder of its exact accomplishment.

"Darrow'll think an earthquake's come after him," remarked Trendon.

"Give way," ordered the captain.

The boat grated on the sand. Captain Parkinson would have entered, but Barnett restrained him.

"It's best to wait a minute or two," he advised. "Occasionally slides follow an explosion tardily, and the gases don't always dissipate quickly."

Where they stood they could see but a short way into the cave. Trendon squatted and funnelled his hands to one eye.



“Sorry not to have met you at the door,” he said courteously

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"There's fire inside," he said.

In a moment they all saw it, a single, pin-point glow, far back in the blackness, a Cyclopean eye, that swayed as it approached. Alternately it waned and brightened. Suddenly it illuminated the dim lineaments of a face. The face neared them. It joined itself to reality by a very solid pair of shoulders, and a man sauntered into the twilit mouth of the cavern, removed a cigarette from his lips, and gave them greeting.

"Sorry not to have met you at the door," he said, courteously. "It was you that knocked, was it not? Yes? It roused me from my siesta."

They stared at him in silence. He blinked in the light, with unaccustomed eyes.

"You will pardon me for not asking you in at once. Past circumstances have rendered me—well—perhaps suspicious is not too strong a word."

They noticed that he held a revolver in his hand.

Captain Parkinson came forward a step. The host half raised his weapon. Then he dropped it abruptly.

"Navy men!" he said, in an altered voice. "I beg your pardon. I could not see at first. My name is Percy Darrow."

"I am Captain Parkinson of the United States cruiser *Wolverine*," said the commander. "This is Mr. Barnett, Mr. Darrow. Dr. Trendon, Mr. Darrow."

They shook hands all around.

"Like some damned silly afternoon tea," Trendon said later, in retailing it to the mess. A pause followed.

"Won't you step in, gentlemen?" said Darrow, "May I offer you the makings of a cigarette?"

"Wouldn't you be robbing yourself?" inquired the captain, with a twinkle.

"Oh, you found the diary, then," said Darrow easily. "Rather silly of me to complain so. But really, in conditions like these, tobacco becomes a serious problem."

"So one might imagine," said Trendon drily. He looked closely at Darrow. The man's eyes were light and dancing. From the nostrils two livid lines ran diagonally. Such lines one might make with a hard blue pencil pressed strongly into the flesh. The surgeon moved a little nearer.

"Can you give me any news of my friend Thrackles?" asked Darrow lightly. "Or the esteemed Pulz? Or the scholarly and urbane Robinson of Ethiopian extraction?"

"Dead," said the captain.

"Ah, a pity," said the other. He put his hand to his forehead. "I had thought it probable." His face twitched. "Dead? Very good. In fact—really—er—amusing."

He began to laugh, quite to himself. It was not a pleasant laugh to hear. Trendon caught and shook him by the shoulder.

"Drop it," he said.

Darrow seemed not to hear him. "Dead, all dead!" he repeated. "And I've outlasted 'em! God damn 'em, I've outlasted 'em!" And his mirth broke forth in a strangely shocking spasm.

Trendon lifted a hand and struck him so powerfully

between the shoulder blades that he all but plunged forward on his face.

"Quit it!" he ordered again. "Get hold of yourself!"

Darrow turned and gripped him. The surgeon winced with the pain of his grasp. "I can't," gasped the maroon, between paroxysms. "I've been living in hell. A black, shaking, shivering hell, for God knows how long. . . . What do *you* know? Have *you* ever been buried alive?" And again the agony of laughter shook him.

"This, then," muttered the doctor, and the hypodermic needle shot home.

During the return Darrow lay like a log in the bottom of the gig. The opiate had done its work. Consciousness was mercifully dead within him.

VII

THE SURVIVORS

REST and good food quickly brought Percy Darrow back to his normal poise. One inspection satisfied Dr. Trendon that all was well with him. He asked to see the captain, and that gentleman came to Ives's room, which had been assigned to the rescued man.

"I hope you've been able to make yourself comfortable," said the commander, courteously.

"It would be strange indeed if I could not," returned Darrow, smiling. "You forget that you have set a savage down in the midst of luxury."

"Make yourself free of Ives's things," invited Captain Parkinson. "Poor fellow; he will not use them again, I fear."

"One of your men lost?" asked Darrow. "Ah, the young officer whose body I found on the beach, perhaps?"

"No; but we have to thank you for that burial," said the captain.

Darrow made a swift gesture. "Oh, if thanks are going," he cried, and paused in hopelessness of adequate expression.

"This has been a bitter cruise for us," continued the captain. He sighed and was silent for a moment. "There is much to tell and to be told," he resumed.

"Much," agreed the other, gravely.

"You will want to see Slade first, I presume," said the captain.

"One of your officers whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting?"

The captain stared. "Slade," he said. "Ralph Slade."

"Apparently there's a missing link. Or—I fear I was not wholly myself yesterday for a time. Possibly something occurred that I did not quite take in."

"Perhaps we'd better wait," said Captain Parkinson, with obvious misgiving. "You're not quite rested. You will feel more like——"

"If you don't mind," said Darrow composedly, "I'd like to get at this thing now. I'm in excellent understanding, I assure you."

"Very well. I am speaking of the man who acted as mate in the *Laughing Lass*. The journalist who—good heavens! What arrant stupidity! I have to beg your pardon, Mr. Darrow. It has just occurred to me. He called himself Eagen with you."

"Eagen! What is this? Is Eagen alive?"

"And on this ship. We picked him up in an open boat."

"And you say he calls himself Slade?"

"He is Ralph Slade, adventurer and journalist. Mr. Barnett knows him and vouches for him."

"And he was on our island under an assumed name," said Darrow in tones that had the smoothness and the rasp of silk. "Rather annoying. Not good form, quite, even for a pirate."

"Yet, I believe he saved your life," suggested the captain.

Darrow looked up sharply. "Why, yes," he admitted. "So he did. I had hoped——" He checked himself. "I had thought that all of the crew went the same way. You didn't find any of the others?"

"None."

Darrow got to his feet. "I think I'd like to see Eagen—Slade—whatever he calls himself."

"I don't know," began the captain. "It might not be——" He hesitated and stopped.

Darrow drew back a little, misinterpreting the other's attitude. "Do I understand that I am under restraint?" he asked stiffly.

"Certainly not. Why should you be?"

"Well," returned the other contemplatively, "it really might be regarded as a subject for investigation. Of course I know only a small part of it. But there have certainly been suspicious circumstances. Piracy there has been: no doubt of that. Murder, too, if my intuitions are not at fault. Or at least, a disappearance to be accounted for. Robbery can't be denied. And there's a dead body or two to be properly accredited." He looked the captain in the eye.

"Well?"

"You'll find my story highly unsatisfactory in detail, I fancy. I merely want to know whether I'm to present it as a defence, or only an explanation."

"We shall be glad to hear your story when you are ready to tell it—after you have seen Mr. Slade."

"Thank you," said Darrow simply. "You have heard his?"

"Yes. It needs filling in."

"When may I see him?"

"That's for Dr. Trendon to say. He came to us almost dead. I'll find out."

The surgeon reported Slade much better, but all a-quiver with excitement.

"Hate to put the strain on him," said he. "But he'll be in a fever till he gets this thing off his mind. Send Mr. Darrow to him."

After a moment's consideration Darrow said: "I should like to have you and Dr. Trendon present, Captain Parkinson, while I ask Eagen one or two questions."

"Understand one thing, Mr. Darrow," said Trendon briefly. "This is not to be an inquisition."

"Ah," said Darrow, unmoved. "I'm to be neither defendant nor prosecutor."

"You are to respect the condition of Dr. Trendon's patient, sir," said Captain Parkinson, with emphasis. "Outside of that, your attitude toward a man who has twice thought of your life before his own is for you to determine."

No little cynicism lurked in Darrow's tones as he said:

"You have confidence in Mr. Slade, alias Eagen."

"Yes," replied Captain Parkinson, in a tone that closed that topic.

"Still, I should be glad to have you gentlemen present, if only for a moment," insisted Darrow, presently.

"Perhaps it would be as well—on account of the patient," said the surgeon significantly.

"Very well," assented the captain.

The three went to Slade's cabin. He was lying

propped up in his bunk. Trendon entered first, followed by the captain, then Darrow.

"Here's your prize, Slade," said the surgeon.

Darrow halted, just inside the door. With an eager light in his face Slade leaned forward and stretched out his hand.

"I couldn't believe it until I saw you, old man," he cried.

Darrow's eyebrows went up. Before Slade had time to note that there was no response to his outstretched hand, the surgeon had jumped in and pushed him roughly back upon his pillow.

"What did you promise?" he growled. "You were to lie still, weren't you? And you'll do it, or out we go."

"How are you, Eagen?" drawled Darrow.

"Not Eagen. I'm done with that. They've told you, haven't they?"

Darrow nodded. "Are you the only survivor?" he inquired.

"Except yourself."

"The Nigger? Pulz? Thrackles? The captain? All drowned?"

"Not the captain. They murdered him."

"Ah," said Darrow softly. "And you—I beg your pardon—your—er—friends disposed of the doctor in the same way?"

"Handy Solomon," replied Slade with shaking lips. "Hell's got that fiend, if there's a hell for human fiends. They threw the doctor's body in the surf."

"You didn't notice whether there were any papers?"

"If there were they must have been destroyed with the body when the lava poured down the valley into the sea."

"The lava: of course," assented Darrow, with elaborate nonchalance. "Well, he was a kind old boy. A cheerful, simple, wise old child."

"I would have given my right hand to save him," cried Slade. "It was so sudden—so damnable——"

"Better to have saved him than me," said Darrow. He spoke with the first touch of feeling that he exhibited. "I have to thank you for my life, Eagen—I beg your pardon: Slade. It's hard to remember."

Dr. Trendon arose, and Captain Parkinson with him.

"Give you two hours, Mr. Darrow," said the surgeon. "No more. If he seems exhausted, give him one of these powders. I'll look in in an hour."

At the end of an hour he returned. Slade was lying back on his pillow. Darrow was talking, eagerly, confidentially. In another hour he came out.

"The whole thing is clear," he said to Captain Parkinson. "I am ready to report to you."

"This evening," said the captain. "The mess will want to hear."

"Yes, they will want to hear," assented Darrow. "You've had Slade's story. I'll take it up where he left off, and he'll check me. Mine's as incredible as—as Slade's was. And it's as true."

VIII

THE MAKER OF MARVELS

As they had gathered to hear Ralph Slade's tale, so now the depleted mess of the *Wolverine* grouped themselves for Percy Darrow's sequel. Slade himself sat directly across from the doctor's assistant. Before him lay a paper covered with jotted notes. Trenchon slouched low in the chair on Slade's right. Captain Parkinson had the other side. Convenient to Darrow's hand lay the material for cigarettes. As he talked he rolled cylinder after cylinder, and between sentences consumed them in long, satisfying puffs.

"First you will want to learn of the fate of your friends and shipmates," he began. "They are dead. One of them, Mr. Edwards, fell to my hands to bury, as you know. He lies beside Handy Solomon. The others we shall probably not see: any one of a score of ocean currents may have swept them far away. The last great glow that you saw was the signal of their destruction. So the work of a great scientist, a potent benefactor of the race, a gentle and kindly old heart, has brought about the death of your friends and of my enemies. The innocent and the guilty . . . the murderer with his plunder, the officer following his duty . . . one and the same end . . . a paltry thing our vaunted science is in the face of such

tangled fates." He spoke low and bitterly. Then he squared his shoulders and his manner became businesslike.

"Interrupt me when any point needs clearing up," he said. "It's a blind trail at best. You've the right to see it as plain as I can make it—with Slade's help. Cut right in with your questions: There'll be plenty to answer and some never will be answered . . .

"Now let me get this thing laid out clearly in my own mind. You first saw the glow—let me see——"

"Night of June 2d," said Barnett.

"June 2d," agreed Darrow. "That was the end of Solomon, Thrackles & Co. A very surprising end to them, if they had time to think," he added grimly.

"Surprising enough, from the survivor's viewpoint," said Slade.

"Doubtless. They've had that story from you; I needn't go over it. This ship picked up the *Laughing Lass*, deserted, and put your first crew aboard. That night, was it not, you saw the second pillar of fire?"

Barnett nodded.

"So your men met their death. Then came the second finding of the empty schooner. . . . Captain Parkinson, they must have been brave men who faced the unknown terrors of that prodigy."

"They volunteered, sir," said the Captain, with simple pride.

Darrow bowed with a suggestion of reverence in the slow movement of his head. "And that night—or was it two nights later?—you saw the last appearance of the portent. Well, I shall come to that. . . .

Slade has told you how they lived on the beach. With us in the valley it was different. Almost from the first I was alone. The doctor ceased to be a companion. He ceased to be human, almost. A machine, that's what he was. His one human instinct was—well, distrust. His whole force of being was centred on his discovery. It was to make him the foremost scientist of the world; the foremost individual entity of his time—of all time, possibly. Even to outline it to you would take too much time. Light, heat, motive power in incredible degrees and under such control as has never been known: these were to be the agencies at his call. The push of a button, the turn of a screw—oh, he was to be master of such power as no monarch ever wielded! Riches—pshaw! Riches were the least of it. He could create them, practically. But they would be superfluous. Power: unlimited, absolute power was his goal. With his end achieved he could establish an autocracy, a dynasty of science: whatever he chose. Oh, it was a rich-hued, golden, glowing dream; a dream such as men's souls don't formulate in these stale days—not our kind of men. The Teutonic mysticism—you understand. And it was all true. Oh, quite."

"Do you mean us to understand that he had this power you describe?" asked Captain Parkinson.

"In his grasp. Then comes a practical gentleman with a steel hook. A follower of dreams, too, in his way. Conflicting interests—you know how it is. One well-aimed blow from the more practical dreamer, and the greater vision passes. . . . I'm getting ahead of myself. Just a moment."

His cigarette glowed fiercely in the dimness before he took up his tale again.

"You all know who Dr. Schermerhorn was. None of you know—I don't know myself, though I've been his factotum for ten years—along how many varied lines of activity that mind played. One of them was the secret of energy: concentrated, resistless energy. Man's contrivances were too puny for him. The most powerful engines he regarded as toys. For a time high explosives claimed his attention. He wanted to harness them. Once he got to the point of practical experiment. You can see the ruins yet: a hole in southern New Jersey. Nobody ever understood how he escaped. But there he was on his feet across a ten-foot fence in a ploughed field—yes, he flew the fence—and running, running furiously in the opposite direction, when the dust cleared away. Someone stopped him finally. Told him the danger was over. 'Yet, I will not return,' he said firmly, and fainted away. That disgusted him with high explosives. What secrets he discovered he gave to the government. They were not without value, I believe."

"They were not, indeed," corroborated Barnett.

"Next his interest turned to the natural phenomena of high energy. He studied lightning in an open steel network laboratory, with few results save a succession of rheumatic attacks, and an improved electric interrupter, since adopted by one of the great telegraph companies. The former obliged him to stop these experiments, and the invention he considered trivial. Probably the great problem of getting at the secret of energy led him into his attempts to study the mys-

terious electrical waves radiated by lightning flashes; at any rate he was soon as deep into the subject of electrical science as his countryman, Hertz, had ever been. He used to tell me that he often wondered why he hadn't taken up this line before—the world of energy he now set out to explore, waves in that tremendous range between those we hear and those we see. It was natural that he should then come to the most prominent radio-active elements, uranium, thorium, and radium. But though his knowledge surpassed that of the much-exploited authorities, he was never satisfied with any of his results.

“‘Pitchblende; no!’ he would exclaim. ‘It has not the great power. The mines are not deep enough, yet!’

“Then suddenly the great idea that was to bring him success, and cost him his life, came to him. The bowels of the earth must hold the secret! He took up volcanoes. . . . Does all this sound foolish? It was not if you knew the man. He was a mighty enthusiast, a born martyr. Not cold-blooded, like the rest of us. The fire was in his veins. . . . A light, please. Thank you.

“We chased volcanoes. There was a theory under it all. He believed that volcanic emanations are caused by a mighty and uncomprehended energy, something that achieves results ascribable neither to explosions nor heat, some eternal, inner source. . . . Radium, if you choose, only he didn't call it that. Radium itself, as known to our modern scientists, he regarded as the harmless plaything of people with time hanging heavy on their hands. He wasn't after force in

pin-point quantities: he wanted bulk results. Yet I believe that, after all, what he sought was a sort of higher power of radium. The phenomena were related. And he had some of that concentrated essence of pitchblende in the chest when we started. Oh, not much: say about twenty thousand dollars' worth. Maybe thirty. For use? No; rather for comparison, I judge.

"Yes, we chased volcanoes. I became used to camping between sample hells of all known varieties. I got so that the fumes of a sulphur match seemed like a draught of pure, fresh air. Wherever any of the earth's pimples showed signs of coming to a head, there were we, taking part in the trouble. By and by the doctor got so thoroughly poisoned that he had to lay off. Back to Philadelphia we came. There an aged seafaring person, temporarily stranded, mulcted the Professor of a dollar—an undertaking that required no art—and in the course of his recital touched upon yonder little cesspool of infernal iniquities. An uncharted volcanic island: one that he could have all for his own; you may guess whether Dr. Schermerhorn was interested.

"That iss for which we haf so-long-in-vain sought, Percy,' he said to me in his quaint, link-chain style of speech. 'A leedle prifate volcano-laboratory to ourselves to have. Totally unknown: undescribed, not-on-the-chart-to-be-found. To-morrow we start. I make a list of the things-to-get.'

"He began his list, as I remember, with three dozen undershirts, a gallon of pennyroyal for insect bites, a box of assorted fish hooks, thirty pounds of tea, and a

case of carpet tacks. When I hadn't anything else to worry over, I used to lie awake at night and speculate on the purpose of those carpet tacks. He had something in mind: if there was anything on which he prided himself, it was his practical bent. But the list never got any further: it ceased short of one page in the ledger, as you may have noticed. I outfitted by telegraph on the way across the continent.

"The doctor didn't ask me whether I'd go. He took it for granted. That's probably why I didn't back out. Nor did I tell him that the three life insurance companies which had foolishly and trustingly accepted me as a risk merely on the strength of a good constitution were making frantic efforts to compromise on the policies. They felt hurt, those companies: my healthy condition had ceased to appeal to them. What's a good constitution between earthquakes? No, there was no use telling the doctor. It would only have worried him. Besides, I didn't believe that the island was there. I thought it was a myth of that stranded ancient mariner's imagination. When it rose to sight at the proper spot, none were more astounded than the bad risk who now addresses you.

"Yet, I must say for the island that it came handsomely up to specifications. Down where you were, Slade, you didn't get a real insight into its disposition. But in back of us there was any kind of action for your money. Geysers, hell-spouts, fuming fissures, cunning little craterlets with half-portions of molten lava ready to serve hot; more gases than you could create in all the world's chemical laboratories: in fact, everything to make the place a paradise for Old Nick



“It was my duty to follow on and drag him away when
he fell unconscious ”

—and Dr. Schermerhorn. He brought along in his precious chest, besides the radium, some sort of raw material: also, as near as I could make out, a sort of cage or guardianship scheme for his concentrated essence of cussedness, when he should get it out of the volcano.

“In the first seven months he puttered around the little fumers, with an occasional excursion up to the main crater. It was my duty to follow on and drag him away when he fell unconscious. Sometimes I would try to get him before he was quite gone. Then he would become indignant, and fight me. Perhaps that helped to lose me his confidence. More and more he withdrew into himself. There were days when he spoke no word to me. It was lonely. Do you know why I used to visit you at the beach, Slade? I suppose you thought I was keeping watch on you. It wasn't that, it was loneliness. In a way, it hurt me, too: for one couldn't help but be fond of the old boy; and at times it seemed as if he weren't quite himself. Pardon me, if I may trouble you for the matches? Thanks. . . .

“Matters went very wrong at times: the doctor fumed like his little craters; growled out long-winded, exhaustive German imprecations: wouldn't even eat. Then again the demon of work would drive him with thong and spur: he would rush to his craters, to his laboratories, to his ledger for the purpose of entering unintelligible commentaries. He had some peculiar contrivance, like a misshapen retort, with which he collected gases from the craterlets. Whenever I'd hear one of those smash, I knew it was a bad day.

Meantime, the volcano also became—well, what you might call temperamental.

“It got to be a year and a quarter—a year and a half. I wondered whether we should ever get away. My tobacco was running short. And the bearing of the men was becoming fidgetty. My visits to the beach became quite interesting—to me. One day the doctor came running out of his laboratory with so bright a face that I ventured to ask him about departure.

“‘Not so long, now, Percy,’ he said, in his old, kind manner. ‘Not so long. The first real success. It is made. We have yet under-entire-control to bring it, but it is made.’

“‘And about time, sir,’ said I. ‘If we don’t do something soon we may have trouble with the men.’

“‘So?’ said he in surprise. ‘But they could do nothing. Nothing.’ He wagged his great head confidently. ‘We are armed.’

“‘Oh, yes, armed. So are they.’

“‘We are armed,’ he repeated obstinately. ‘Such as no man was ever armed, are we armed.’

“He checked himself abruptly and walked away. Well, I’ve since wondered what would have happened had the men attacked us. It would have been worth seeing, and—and surprising. Yes: I’m quite certain it would have been surprising. Perhaps, too, I might have learned more of the Great Secret . . . and yet, I don’t know. It’s all dark . . . a hint here . . . theory . . . mere glints of light. . . . Where did I put . . . Ah, thank you.”

IX

THE ACHIEVEMENT

For some moments Darrow sat gazing fixedly at the table before him. His cigarette tip glowed and failed. Someone suggested drinks. The captain asked Darrow what he would have, but the question went unnoted.

"How I passed the next six months I could hardly tell you," he began again, quite abruptly. "At times I was bored—fearfully bored. Yet the element of mystery, of uncertainty, of underlying peril, gave a certain zest to the affair. In the periods of dulness I found some amusement in visiting the lower camp and baiting the Nigger. Slade will have told you about him; he possessed quite a fund of bastard Voodooism: he possessed more before I got through with him. Yes; if he had lived to return to his country, I fancy he would have added considerably to Afro-American witch-lore. You remember the vampire bats, Slade? And the devil-fires? Naturally I didn't mention to you that the devil-fire business wasn't altogether as clear to me as I pretended. It wasn't, though. But at the time it served very well as an amusement. All the while I realised that my self-entertainment was not without its element of danger, too: I remember glances not altogether friendly but always a little doubtful, a little awed. Even Handy Solomon, prac-

tical as he was, had a scruple or two of superstition in his make-up, on which one might work. Only Eagen—Slade, I mean—was beyond me there. You puzzled me not a little in those days, Slade. Well . . .

“Did I say that I was sometimes annoyed by the doctor’s attitude? Yes: it seemed that he might have given me a little more of his confidence; but one can’t judge such a man as he was. Among the ordinary affairs of life he had relied on me for every detail. Now he was independent of me. Independent! I doubt if he remembered my existence at times. Even in his blackest moods of depression he was sufficient unto himself. It was strange. . . . How he did rage the day the chemicals from Washington went wrong! I was washing my shirt in the hot water spring when he came bolting out of the laboratory and keeled me over. I came out pretty indignant. Apologise? Not at all. He just sputtered. His nearest approach to coherence seemed to indicate a desire that I should go back to Washington at once and destroy a perfectly reputable firm of chemists. Finally he calmed down and took it out in entering it in his daily record. He was quite proud of that daily record and remembered to write in it on an average of once a week.

“Then the chest went wrong. Whether it had rusted a bit, or whether the chemicals had got in their work on the hinges, I don’t know; but one day the Professor, of his own initiative, recognised my existence by lugging his box out in the open and asking me to fix it. Previously he had emptied it. It was

rather a complicated thing, with an inner compartment over which was a hollow cover, opening along one rim. That, I conjectured, was designed to hold some chemical compound or salt. There were many minor openings, too, each guarded by a similar hollow door. My business was with the heavy top cover.

" 'It should shut and open softly, gently,' explained the Professor. 'So. Not with-a-grating-sound-to-be-accompanied,' he added, with his curious effect of linked phraseology.

" 'Half a day's work fixed it. The lid would stand open of itself until tipped at a considerable angle, when it would fall and lock. Only on the outer shell was there a lock: that one was a good bit of craftsmanship.

" 'So, Percy, my boy,' said the doctor kindly. 'That will with-sufficient-safety guard our treasure. When we obtain it, Percy. When it entirely-finished-and-completed shall be.'

" 'And when will that be?' I asked.

" 'God knows,' he said cheerfully. 'It progresses.'

" Whenever I went strolling at night, he would produce his curious lights. Sometimes they were fairly startling. One fact I made out by accident, looking down from a high place. They did not project from the laboratory. He always worked in the open when the light was to be produced. Once the experiment took a serious turn. The lights had flickered and gone. Dr. Schermerhorn had returned to his laboratory. I came up the arroyo as he flung the door open and rushed out. He was a grotesque figure, clad in

an undershirt and a worn pair of trousers, fastened with an old bit of tarred rope in lieu of his suspenders, which I had been repairing. About his waist flickered a sort of aura of radiance which was extinguished as he flung himself headforemost into the cold spring. I hauled him out. He seemed dazed. To my questions he replied only by mumblings, the burden of which was:

“‘I do not understand. It is a not-to-be-comprehended accident.’ It appears that he didn’t quite know why he had taken to the water. Or if he did, he didn’t want to tell.

“Next day he was as good as new. Just as silent as before, but it was a smiling, satisfied silence. So it went for weeks, for months, with the accesses of depression and anger always rarer. Then came an afternoon when, returning from a stalk after sheep, I heard strange and shocking noises from the laboratory. Strict as was the embargo which kept me outside the door, I burst in, only to be seized in a suffocating grip. Of a sudden I realised that I was being embraced. The doctor flourished a hand above my head and jigged with ponderous steps. The dismal noises continued to emanate from his mouth. He was singing. I wish I could give you a notion of the amazement, the paralysing wonder with which. . . . No, you did not know Dr. Schermerhorn: you would not understand. . . .

“We polkaed into the open. There he cast me loose. He stopped singing and burst into a rhapsody of disjointed words. Mostly German, it was—a wondrous jumble of the scientific and poetic. ‘Eureka’ occurred

at intervals. Then he would leap in the air. It was weird, it was distressing. Crazy? Oh, quite. For the time, you understand. If any of us should suddenly become the most potent individual in the world, wouldn't he be apt to lose balance temporarily? One must make allowances. There was excuse for the doctor. He had reached the goal.

"'Percy, you shall be rewarded,' he said. 'You haf like-a-trump-card stuck by me. You shall haf riches, gold, what you will. You are young; your blood runs red. With such riches nothing is beyond you. You could the ancient-tombs-of-Egypt explore. It is open to you such collections-as-have-never-been-gathered to make. What shall it be? Scarabs? Mis-sals? Prehistoric implements? Amuse yourself, *mein kind*. We shall be able the-bills-with-usurious-interest to pay. What will you haf?'

"I said I'd like a vacation, if convenient.

"'Presently,' he replied. 'There yet remains the guardianship to be perfected. Then to-a-world-astonished-and-respectful we return. To-night we celebrate. I play you a rubber of pinochle.'

"We played. With the greatest secret of science resting at our elbows, we played. The doctor won; my mind was not strictly on the game. In the morning the doctor sang once more. . . . I shall never hear its like again. Was it a week, or a month, after that? . . . I cannot remember. I fancy I was excited. Then, too, there was something in the atmosphere about the laboratory . . . I don't know; imagination, possibly. Once we had a little manifestation: the night that the Nigger and Slade were terri-

fied by the rock fires. Days of excitement and pleasant work, with the little volcano grumbling more sulkily all the time . . . I have spent worse days.

"Such indifference as the doctor displayed toward the volcano I have never known. If I ventured to warn him he would assure me that there was no cause for alarm. I think he regarded that little hell's kitchen as merely a feed-spout for his vast enterprise. He felt a sort of affection toward it; he was tolerant of its petty fits of temper. That he completed his work before the destruction came was sheer luck. Nothing else. The day before the outburst he came to me with a tiny phial of complicated design.

"'Percy, I will at-a-reasonable-price sell this to you,' he said.

"'How much?' I inquired, responding to his playfulness.

"'A bargain,' he cried gaily. 'Five millions dollars. No! Shall I upon-a-needy-friend hard-press? Never. One million. One little million dollars.'

"'I haven't that amount with me,' I began.

"'Of no account,' he declared airily. 'Soon we shall haf many more times as that. Gif me your C. O. D.'

"'My I. O. U.?' I inquired.

"'It makes no matter. See. I will gif it to you gratis.'

"He handed me the metal contrivance. It was closed.

"'Inside iss a little, such a very little. Not yet iss it arranged the motive-power to give-forth. One more change-to-be-made that shall require. But the other

phenomena are all in this little half-grain comprised. Later I shall tell you more. Take it. It is without price.' He laid his hand on my shoulder. 'Like the love of friends,' he said gently."

Feeling in his upper waistcoat pocket, Darrow brought out a phial, so tiny that it rolled in the palm of his hand. He contemplated it, lost in thought.

"Radium?" queried Barnett, with the keen interest of the scientist.

"God knows *what* it is," said Darrow, rousing himself. "Not the perfected product; the doctor said that when he gave it to me. If I could remember one-tenth of what he told me that night! It is like a disordered dream, a phantasmagoria of monstrous powers, lit up with an intolerable, almost an infernal radiance. This much I did gather: that Dr. Schermerhorn had achieved what the greatest minds before him had barely outlined. Yes, and more. Becquerel, the Curies, Rutherford—they were playing with the letters of the Greek alphabet, Alphas, Gammas, and Rhos, while the simple, gentle old boy that I served had read the secret. From the molten eruptions of the racked earth he had taken gases and potencies that are nameless. By what methods of combination and refining I do not know, he produced something that was to be the final word of power. Control—control—that was all that lacked.

"Reduced to its simplest terms, it meant this: the doctor had something as much greater than radium as radium is greater than the pitchblende of which a thousand tons are melted down to the one ounce of extract. And the incredible energies of this he pro-

posed to divide into departments of activity. One manifestation should be light, a light that would illuminate the world. Another was to make motive power so cheap that the work of the world could be done in an hour out of the day. Some idea he had of healing properties. Yes; he was to cure mankind. Or kill, kill as no man had ever killed, did he choose. The armies and navies of the powers would be at his mercy. Magnetism was to be his slave. Aërial navigation, transmutation of metals, the screening of gravity—does this sound like delirium? Sometimes I think it was.

“That night he turned over to me the key of the large chest and his ledger. The latter he bade me read. It was a complete jumble. You have seen it. . . . We were up a good part of the night with our pet volcano. It was suffering from internal disturbances. ‘So,’ the doctor would say indulgently, when a particularly active rock came bounding down our way. ‘Little play-antics-to-exhibit now that the work is finished.’

“In the morning he insisted on my leaving him alone and going down to give the orders. I took the ledger, intending to send it aboard. It saved my life possibly: Solomon’s bullet deflected slightly, I think, in passing through the heavy paper. Slade has told you about my flight. I ought to have gone straight up the arroyo. . . . Yet I could hardly have made it. . . . I did not see him again, the doctor. My last glimpse . . . the old man—I remember now how the grey had spread through his beard—he was growing old—it had been ageing labour. He

stood there at his laboratory door and the mountain spouted and thundered behind.

“ ‘We will a name-to-suit-properly gif it,’ he said, as I left him. ‘It shall make us as the gods. We will call it celestium.’

“I left him there smiling. Smiling happily. The greatest force of his age—if he had lived. Very wise, very simple—a kind old child. May I trouble you for a light? Thanks.”

X

THE DOOM

"NOTHING remained but to search for his body. I was sure they had killed him and taken the chest. I had little expectation of finding him, dead or alive. None after I saw the stream of lava pouring into the sea. One saves his own life by instinct, I suppose. There I was. I had to live. It did not matter much, but I continued to do it by various shifts. That last day on the headland the fumes nearly got me. You may have noted the rather excited scrawl in the back of the ledger? Yes, I thought I was gone that time. But I got to the cave. It was low tide. Then the earthquake, and I was walled in. . . . Mr. Barnett's very accurate explosives—Slade's insistence—your risking your lives as you did, mites on the crust of a red-hot cheese—I hope you know how I feel about it all. One can't thank a man properly for the life . . .

"Oh, the pirates. Necessarily it must be a matter of theory, but I think we have it right. Slade and I built it up. For what it's worth, here it is. Let me see: you sighted the glow on the night of the 2d. Next day came the deserted ship. It must have puzzled you outrageously."

"It did," said Captain Parkinson, drily.

"Not an easy problem, even with all the data at hand. You, of course, had none. On Slade's showing, Handy Solomon and his worthy associates thought they had a chest full of riches when they got the doctor's treasure; believed they owned the machinery for making diamonds or gold or what-not of ready-to-hand wealth. It's fair to assume a certain eagerness on their part. Disturbed weather keeps them busy until they're well out from the island. Then to the chest. Opening it isn't so easy: I had the key, you know." He brought a curious and delicately wrought skeleton from his pocket. "Tipped with platinum," he observed. "Rather a gem of a key, I think. You see, there must have been some action, even through the keyhole, or he wouldn't have used a metal of this kind. But the crew was rich in certain qualities, it seems, which I failed, stupidly, to recognise in my acquaintance with them. Both Pulz and Perdosa appear to have been handy men where locks were concerned. First Pulz sneaks down and has his turn at the chest. He gets it open. Small profit for him in that: the next we know of him he is scandalising Handy Solomon by having a fit on the deck."

"That is what I couldn't figure out to save my life," said Slade eagerly.

"If you recollect, I told you of the Professor's plunge in the cold spring, in a sort of paroxysm, one day," said Darrow. "That was the physiological action of the celestium. At other times, I have seen him come out and deliberately roll in the creek, head under. Once he explained that the medium he worked in caused a kind of uncontrollable longing for water;

something having none of the qualities of burning or thirst, but an irresistible temporary mania. It worried him a good deal; he didn't understand it. That, then, was what ailed Pulz. When he opened the chest there was, as I surmise, a trifling quantity of this stuff lying in the inner lid. It wasn't the celestium itself, as I imagine, but a sort of by-product with the physiological and radiant effects of the real thing, and it had been set there on guard, a discouragement to the spirit of investigation, as it were. So, when the top was lifted, our little guardian gets in its work, producing the light phenomenon that so puzzled Slade, and inspiring Pulz with a passion for the rolling wave, which is only interrupted by Handy Solomon's tackling him. As he fled he must have pulled down the cover."

"He did," said Slade. "I heard the clang. But I saw the radiance on the clouds. And the whole thickness of a solid oak deck was in between the sky and the chest."

"Oh, a little thing like an oak deck wouldn't interrupt the kind of rays the doctor used. He had his own method of screening, you understand. However, this inconsiderable guardian affair must have used itself up, which true celestium wouldn't have done. So when Perdosa sets his genius for lock-picking to the task, the inner box, full of the genuine article, has no warning sign-post, so to speak. Everything's peaceful until they raise the compound-filled hollow layer of the inner cover, which serves to interrupt the action. Then comes the general exit and the superior fireworks."

"That's when the rays ran through the ship," said Slade. "It seemed to follow the deck-lines."

"The stuff had a strange affinity for tar," said Darrow. "I told you of the circle of fire about Professor Schermerhorn's waist the day he gave me such a scare. That was the celestium working on the tarred rope he wore for a belt. It made a livid circle on his skin. Did I tell you of his experiments with pitch? It doesn't matter. Where was I?"

"At the place where we all jumped," said Slade.

"Oh, yes. And you dove into the small boat, trying to reach the water."

"Wait a bit," said Barnett. "If that was the exhibition of radiance we saw, it died out in a few minutes. How was that? Did they close the chest before they ran?"

"Probably not," replied Darrow. "Slade spoke of Pulz taking to the maintop and being shaken out by the sudden shock of a wave. That may have been a volcanic billow. Whatever it was, it undoubtedly heeled the ship sufficiently to bring down both lids, which were rather delicately balanced."

"Yes, for Billy Edwards found the chest closed and locked," said Barnett.

"Of course; it was a spring lock. You sent Mr. Edwards and his men aboard. No such experts as Pulz or Perdosa were in your crew. Consequently it took longer to get the chest open. When at length the lid was raised, there was a repetition of the tragedy. Mr. Edwards and his men leaped. Probably they were paralysed almost before they struck the water. Your bos'n, whom Slade picked up, was the

only one who had time even to grab a life preserver before the impulse toward water became irresistible. There was no element of fright, you understand: no desertion of their post. They were dragged as by the sweep of a tornado." Darrow spoke direct to Captain Parkinson. "If there is any feeling among you other than sorrow for their death, it is unjust and unworthy."

"Thank you, Mr. Darrow," returned the captain quietly.

"We found the chest closed again when the empty ship came back," observed Barnett.

"Being masterless, the schooner began to yaw," continued Darrow. "The first time she came about would have heeled her enough to shut the chest. Now came the turn of your other men."

"Ives and McGuire," said the Captain, as Darrow paused.

"The glow came again that night, and the next day we picked up Slade," said Barnett.

"You know what the glow meant for your companions," said Darrow.

"But the ship. The *Laughing Lass*, man. She's vanished. No one has seen her since."

"You are wrong there," said Darrow. "I have seen her."

In a common impulse the little circle leaned to him.

"Yes, I have seen her. I wish I had not. Let me bring my story back to the cave on the island. After the volcanic gases had driven me to the refuge, I sat near the mouth of the cave looking out into the dark-

ness. That was the night of the 7th, the night you saw the last glow. It was very dark, except for occasional bursts of fire from the crater. Judge of my incredulous amazement when, in an access of this illumination, I saw plainly a schooner hardly a mile off shore, coming in under bare poles."

"Under bare poles?" cried Slade.

"The halliards must have disintegrated from some slow action of the celestium. It could be destructive: terrifically destructive. You shall judge. There was the schooner, naked as your hand. Possibly I might have thought it a hallucination but for what came after. Darkness fell again. I supposed then that Handy Solomon's crew were managing—or mismanaging—the *Laughing Lass* without the aid of their leader, whom I had satisfactorily buried. I hoped they would come ashore on the rocks. Yes I was vengeful . . . then.

"Of a sudden there sprang from the darkness a ship of light. You have all seen those great electric effects at expositions. Someone touches a button . . . you know. It was like that. Only that the piercingly brilliant jewelled wonder of a ship was set in the midst of a swirl of vari-coloured radiance such as I can't begin to describe. You saw it from a distance. Imagine what it was, coming close upon you that way—dead on, out of the night. A living glory, a living terror. . . ."

His voice sank. With a shaking hand he fumbled amid his cigarette papers.

"It came on. A human figure, glowing like a diamond ablaze, leaped out from it; another shot down

from the foremast. I don't know how many I saw go. It was like a theatric effect, unreal, unconvincing, incredible. The end fitted it."

Darrow's eye roved. It fell upon a quaintly modelled ship, hung above the door.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Fool thing some Malay gave me," grunted Trendon. "Pretended to be grateful because I cut his foot off. No good. Go on with the story."

"No good? You don't care what happens to it?"

"Meant to heave it overboard before now," growled the other.

Someone handed it down to Darrow.

"If I had something to hold enough water," muttered he, "I'd like to float it. I'd like to see for myself how it worked out. I'd like to see that devil-work in action."

He spoke feverishly.

"Boy, fill the portable rubber tub in Mr. Forsythe's cabin and bring it here," ordered the captain.

"That will do," said Darrow, recovering himself.

He floated the model in the tub.

"Now, I don't know how this will come out," he said. "Nor do I know why the *Laughing Lass* met her fate under Ives and McGuire, and not before. Perhaps the chest lay open longer . . . long enough, anyway. We'll try it."

From his pocket he took a curious small phial.

"Is that what Dr. Schermerhorn gave you?" asked Slade.

"Yes," said Darrow. He set it carefully inside the

little model and slipped a lever. Slade quietly turned down the light.

A faint glow shot up. It grew bright and eddied in lovely, variant colours. As if set to a powder train, it ran through the ship. The pale faces of the spectators shone ghastly in its radiance. From someone burst a sudden gasp.

"There is not enough for danger," said Darrow, quietly.

"As a point of interest," grunted Trendon.

Everyone looked at his outstretched hand. A little pocket compass lay in the palm. The needle spun madly, projecting blue, vivid sparklings.

"My God!" cried Slade, and covered his eyes for a moment.

He snatched away his hands as a suppressed cry went up from the others.

"As I expected," said Darrow quietly.

The little craft opened out; it disintegrated. All that radiance dissolved and with its going the substance upon which it shaped itself vanished. The last glow showed a formless pulp, spreading upon the water.

"So passed the *Laughing Lass*," said Darrow solemnly.

"And the chest is at the bottom of the sea," said Barnett.

"Good place for it," muttered Trendon.

"In all probability it closed as the ship dissolved around it," said Darrow. "Otherwise we should see the effects in the water."

"It might be recovered," cried Slade, excitedly.

"Could you chart it, Darrow? Think of the possibilities——"

"Let it lie," said the captain. "Has it not cost enough? Let it lie."

The water in the tub fumed and sparkled faintly and was still. Darkness fell, except where Darrow's cigarette point glowed and faded.

THE END

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"MAKE FOR THE SHORE, OR YOU WILL BE OVER THE RAPIDS."—Page 12.

SHIPS BY DAY

A NOVEL

BY

EDWIN A. WYMAN, PH.D., D.D.

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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TO THE MEMORY
OF MY VERY DEAR FRIEND
George C. Marshall,
TRUE TO THE HEART'S CORE IN FRIENDSHIP
AND IN THE INTEGRITY WITH WHICH
HE TROD THE PATHS OF BUSINESS,
AND, AMONG THE LIVING,
THOUGH WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE OR CONSENT, TO
Hon. C. J. Converse,
MALDEN'S FIRST MAYOR AND FIRST CITIZEN,
WHOSE LIBERALITY OF MIND
AND HEART MERIT ADMIRATION AND ESTEEM,
THIS VOLUME IS
LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

BELIEVING the book entitled "Ships That Pass in the Night," though containing many good things, is calculated to do harm, offering, as it does, nothing better than a mere guess for a dying pillow, I have written the present volume with the hope, among other things, that the reader may not only be entertained by the story, but finish its pages with the conviction that immortality is something more than a guess, and that the human ship, instead of sailing in the "night," has before it, in spite of occasional clouds and uncertainties, an open sea and the clear light of day.

Aside from the fact that another life is essential to supplement and give meaning to this, no one can rise from the death-bed scene of Dr. Blentwood, which was an actual occurrence, and still doubt existence beyond the grave.

It is the belief of the author that the following pages contain the germs of reform greatly needed, and that must come sooner or later. Though the story may seem to border on the sensational, the great underlying purpose has been to touch the springs of amendment in certain lines of thought and life.

EDWIN A. WYMAN

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SHIPS BY DAY.

CHAPTER I.

AFLOAT.

I HAD long pondered the question how to spend a vacation so as to get the most recreation and consequent profit out of it. I at length decided to take a leisurely trip down the Connecticut River with no companion to entertain me or to be entertained by me. Having purchased a light sail-boat and stored it with provisions, I pushed from the shore of what we will call Rocktown one beautiful day in June, full of the glow of bright anticipations and with a sense of freedom which made me hilarious and glad to my fingers' ends.

My mind was preternaturally active—in a sort of poetic frenzy—from overwork. In short, my physician had told me I had reached the incipient limit of nervous prostration, and that very morning had repeated with solemn emphasis, “You must throw up all care at once and let your mind run fallow or you will break down utterly.” I was in that peculiar state of mental fervor and bodily

exhaustion which will explain the very strange experience through which I was so soon to pass.

"Isn't this jolly?" said I, half to myself and half to my shadow, which nodded to me from the rippling water as I sat in the stern of the boat and glided out into the current. "No more writing or teaching for the present, no anxieties about anybody, no one to look after but myself! Oh! it is glorious to be free upon occasion, indifferent to the world, and careless of everything except to sip the dew of pleasure from the proffered cup of the present.

"Civilization indeed! Poor fools! let them breathe hot steam and dust, and elbow their way through an overcrowded business, and then die in as great a hurry as they lived, with the unanswered question on their tongues or in their hearts, What of it all?

"There is some education in such a life; but beyond that there is no significance in it. Slaves of an unmeaning care! I leave you to your unnecessary burdens. I'll none of it, at least for the present! I am free! Hurrah! Good boat, it is you and I emancipated together from the thralldom of civilized folly! Soul, till now careful and troubled about many things, you have nothing to do but to drink in the beautiful prospect, the pleasant sunshine, the present joy."

The sun shone brightly on woods, field and river, flooding all my sensibilities and making me in love with life. This and the added sense of freedom from all care filled me with the very

luxury of satisfaction. I did not look to past or future; I was resting, and that was enough. I stretched myself back against the stern in a half-reclining posture. Shading my eyes with my hat and letting my boat sail itself, I gave myself up to all the sweetness I could extract from sight and sound and easy reflection. Houses along the shores appeared and disappeared; beautiful forests with opening glades and glens came and went; merry voices of children and sweet songs of birds gladdened the ear and then died away; new scenes, no two alike, constantly coming and constantly going, and still I rested and glided on, unmindful of time and of everything else except the present. Oh, how I enjoyed that sail! Like a tired child in the lap of a loved mother, I was contented to lie still and rest, taking in with sweet satisfaction whatever came to me through the senses without effort. I was happy. I wanted nothing. Hours passed. The vertical sun told of noon, but I hungered not. At last, I lost consciousness and fell asleep. How long I slept I know not.

Sometime that or the next day, however, I was aroused by a sudden lurch of my boat which nearly sent me overboard, and the first thing I saw was a small white hand on the side of the boat and a beautiful face earnestly gazing into mine. I had fallen asleep full of sweet visions, and was too much at peace with all the world to be easily startled or afraid, and I looked at this sudden and unexpected appearance with simple

curiosity, wondering what it could mean, but with no effort to rise. I had left home resolved not to let anything disturb me, and I was so happy, so satisfied with my new-found freedom, that scarcely a cannon's ball whizzing near my head, would have made me at all anxious.

The face was very attractive, and the longer I gazed the more I saw in it of a deeper beauty and a tenderer pathos, such as belongs only to a soul richly endowed with the purest and noblest feeling. The vision, therefore, was pleasant. One more added to the many with which I was filled, and I began to hope that it would not disappear as suddenly as it came. I thought of the old saying, "If you speak to a ghost it will vanish," and so, proving the force of early impressions, I said nothing. I had for years wished I might communicate with a real ghost and learn something more definite of the spirit land, and I longed to speak, but rationalism came to my rescue and I said within myself:

"This is all imagination, of course. A snag tipped my boat and one of the angel thoughts of my dream stood out embodied before me, and I am holding the vision of it—that is all! It is only in our dreams that the angels on Jacob's ladder descend to us from heaven. When we awake the angels become mortals or vanish.

"How sweet it would be to go out of the world in a dream, having heavenly society to start with! But how real that face is! It is as if an angel were about to disclose wondrous things.

The Bible speaks of such messengers appearing to men of old and why not to me? The old prophets could not have longed more for direct heavenly instruction than I, and, oh! if this silence could be broken but for a moment, what joy—what relief to a troubled, doubting world!

“But if this were a heavenly visitant it would not have appeared to me submerged all but head and shoulders under water. And again, would a messenger from the spirit world look so exactly like flesh and blood? Possibly. But she has a modern dress and tiny ear-ring and diamond pin! I must give up the angel theory. But what is it? Not a believer in nymphs, it must be an optical illusion or a real, terrestrial, *bona fide* girl. Of course it is not a spirit, glad as I should be to see one; for, though there are reasons why God should satisfy my longings for information, there are others why He should not break the silence of ages.

“But the idea of this being a girl is preposterous. First, because swimming girls are not common. Second, where could she come from in this wild region? for not a house is to be seen. Third, what motive could bring her through the water to my side and in so rich a dress? It is no girl—that’s settled. By *reductio ad absurdum*, I prove it.

“How glorious is reason! But the image is still there! Like Banquo’s ghost, it will not down, reason or no reason! The sense of sight says. that is a girl; reason says it is not.

Evidently I must employ another sense as a corrective."

I felt a pride in settling such questions by reason alone; but at length I opened my half-closed eyes and raised my head toward the vision, when, to my utter astonishment, the face brightened with a look of relief as she cried:

"Make for the shore or you will be over the rapids!"

CHAPTER II.

RESCUED.

WITH these hurried words ringing in my ears I sat up, still only half conscious from so long a sleep and the reaction of an overtaxed brain and worn-out nerves. It was twilight, fast deepening into shade. I was confused. An overwhelming sense of languor came over me and I sank back into my old place with only one wish in my heart of all the world, and that was rest !

"Oh, how sweet is rest !" I muttered half audibly. A splash in the water and a sudden turn of my boat caused me again to assume the erect posture and to make a great effort to collect myself. I looked for the vision. It was gone ! I could see nothing but water and woods, and heard no sound save the rippling waves pattering monotonously against the bow of my boat, which in turn gave an occasional nod as if in recognition of the gentle caress. I will solve this riddle in the morning, said I to myself, and lay down, feeling thankful I could now enjoy much-needed repose.

The gentle god of sleep only waited this opportunity to woo and bear me away to the land of sweet forgetfulness. Never was a visitor more

welcome. With a grateful heart I felt his touch upon my limbs, upon my brow, upon my eyes and quickly yielding up the self-directing will, I floated off into lovely dreamland with angelic companionship, over verdant hills and sweet valleys, and, just as I was softly—oh, so softly!—sinking down, down, down, into utter and blessed obliviousness, I awoke with a choking sensation and with my head partially under water. The shock roused my memory and my first thought was of the rapids. I soon discovered, however, that I was still in the boat with the bow high and dry on a steep bank of the river, while the stern was so low as to bring it for a moment under water.

I had evidently just been placed in that position, for some one was still tugging at the bow. I raised my head, wet and dripping, and stared about. I tried to rise, but found myself too weak to do so. I tried to assure myself of my identity but could not trace all the incidents connecting me with the morning. Perhaps I am drowned, I thought. Unable to take in the situation, all I could do was to await developments. Presently my angelic visitant approached. Neither of us spoke till her face was near enough to be quite distinctly seen. It was very beautiful, lit up with such a happy commingling of benevolence, strength and loveliness as to disarm all fear; and when she spoke her voice and words were in harmony with what her face prognosticated.

"You must be very ill," she said, in a tone s

tender and so full of solicitude as to win my confidence at once.

"Beautiful being," said I, "are you mortal or immortal?"

"Both," she replied, after some hesitation, and then added with a smile, "We all live in two worlds, I suppose."

"In two worlds!" I repeated. "I, indeed, seem to be on the border between a new past and a new future, and not exactly in either. Have you come to take me to heaven?"

She again smiled and slowly answered, "I am here to see that you are taken to a place of rest."

"Rest," I echoed; "mine ears attend the sound. There is no sweeter word, good being. When shall this rest be mine?"

"Now," she replied. "Can you walk? Let me assist you," and taking me by the arm I was soon on my feet, and with great effort took two or three steps and then fell. Looking up into her sweet face and seeing there a tear of sympathy, I said :

"You have no wings for me, but I thank you all the same. I think my old body still clings to me. Let me lie here a minute and by that time it may be dead enough for me to get out of it. It didn't quite drown, did it?"

Without replying to my question, she hurriedly left me, saying, "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Gone to give me time to reflect," I mused. "It is well, perhaps, that the change from earth

to heaven be not too sudden. It might stun and dazzle these unaccustomed eyes, and quite confound these weak faculties and powers, before they could adjust themselves to their new relations. I am content. Had I been better and nobler, I wonder wherein my exit would have been different. I feel no pain, and Hope, beautiful and full-orbed, shines over me, and seems to beckon me on. I begin to thrill with the glorious knowledge into which I am about to enter. Old body, I once loved thee, but the sooner now we are divorced the better. I desire thee no longer. Thou dost but encumber, enslave and chain me down. Let me go, and I will be so light!—so free! I will ascend, up, up, from the circumference to the very centre of knowledge! “Fly swift around, ye wheels of time”—At this moment a dark figure approached and stood over me. I looked up and at length said, “I once thought you ugly, but you are now most welcome.”

“I nebber harms nobody,” said the figure.

“True,” I replied, “death is not a harm. Thousands suffer because they cannot die. To the soul prepared death does but open the door to greater progress. Have you come to help me shuffle off this mortal coil?”

“Be Model Koll de name ob your boat? I is not here to shuffle off with dat, sah. I is here to tote ye to de house.”

“The house not made with hands? Do you live there? I forget, you cannot enter there.”

“I does enter dere, for Doctor and Miss Blent-

wood hab us in de dinin'-room ebery mornin' to hear de Scriptur' and de prayer."

"Then your name is not Death?"

"Lord! no, sah. You look like you could take dat name better'n dis yere nigger. My name Tom."

"Is it simply Tom?"

"No, not Simple Tom; jes' Tom—dat's all."

"I mean, is that all your name?"

"All mine, boss, 'cept what de ole woman owns. Dey all call her Tot, cos she so big one way as tudder!"

"Have you no other name?"

"No udder legally detachin' to me."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nigh on to seberal year, massa. I came wid Miss Ethel after de doctor came, and was mighty tickled to be tuck along, too."

"Ah! I see. You came over the dark river together."

"'Tain't the fust time we cross de ribber."

"Then you have died the second death. Is that why you are so black?"

"I is jes' as de Lord made me, sah, and I hain't died no second def, nor de fust one nudder."

"I spoke unadvisedly the dull phrase of earth. It is true you did not die; only the body can die. But will you not be made white as wool?"

"'Spect de Lord like black well as white. Folks am whitest when dey faint, but spect we'll all be well forebber when we put on de

high glory ob de Lord. Here come Tot. Massa Blentwood got home, Tot?"

"No, Tom, and Miss Ethel so anxious. She say, 'Tot, you can help Tom better'n I, and I'll get things ready.' So I run all de way here. Hole out yer arms, Tom, wid dis cushion on, while I place him into 'em. Dar now, tote him easy, and when ye get tired jes' gib him to me. Is you comf'able, sah?"

"Oh, yes, kind friends, you have made my bed soft as downy pillows are."

"Tank ye, sah; dat'll please missus to know we does it comf'able for ye. De wust is going up dis yere bank, but nebber you fear, sah, dese yere arms nebber fail when on dooty, sah, special for missus."

"Are you taking me to the Celestial City?"

"We be takin' you to de house where de bright lady lib what took ye from the drownin' ribber. You'll be well took keer of, sah; missus am a angel, sure."

"Shall I see that beautiful being again and talk with her?"

"Sartin, for sure; we's takin' you dar by her 'spress commands. We be her mos' willin' sarvants, sah."

"Servants? I thought heaven a Democratic land."

"It mount be, sah. Heap 'Publicans roun' here. Right smart chance of 'em change on tudder side, but power of 'em coming back."

"Are you permitted to stand in the presence

of the highest company and drink with them at the same fountain?"

"We eats in de kitchen, sah; in de hell."

"Are, then, heaven and hell so near? and do the wicked serve the just?"

"Oh, lors, massa, I dunno. I warn't talkin' 'bout de fiery brimster hell. I mean de hell ob de house."

"Are you happy, good servants?"

"Why shoon we? We sarve a good man and a angel and wants nuffin. I works out, too, when I please. Why shoon we be 'appy?"

"Ah! I see. Yours is a kind of paradise next to heaven, almost heaven, not quite heaven, and yet heaven after all."

"Dat's it, sah. You hit our fix on de cocoa-nut perzakly. Ef heaven mean 'nuff, den to all 'tents and parpuses we lib in dat same place sure."

During all this conversation I had been borne along at a rapid pace for negro feet, and had been transferred several times from one pair of arms to the other; but each change had been made so deftly that I scarcely knew it. Indeed, had I been carried less carefully, my mind was too active to feel bodily pain. I was in that peculiar and happy state of incipient brain-fever which, aided by circumstances, produced and kept up the delusion that I had passed or was passing out of the earthly life and entering upon the sublime surprises of another state. Everything I saw or heard, coming to me through the alembic of a glowing imagi-

nation, was transformed and transfigured. There was nothing in my condition akin to insanity; for my mind was clear as crystal and my reasoning faculties unimpaired. It was simply a state of exaltation of mind over body. Thought seemed unconfined and to range at will, and though I seemed

" Exiled from earth and not yet winged for heaven,
Like the edges of a sunset cloud
The beatific land before me lay."

I was in an elysium of mingled sweet content and sweet expectancy.

At length, after some silence, and just as we were entering under the shadow of a very high wall, which seemed to cross our path at right angles, I said, "Ah! the outer wall of the New Jerusalem. Will any one be waiting and watching for me at the gate?"

I had hardly got the words out of my mouth when I felt myself turning short to the left and descending into the earth and into total darkness.

"Purgatory!" I murmured, shrinking back. "I never believed in it. Is there no other way?"

"No udder way," replied Tom, "on dis yere side."

I strained my eyes to take in the situation, but could see nothing, not even those who bore me. I was being carried very cautiously and at a much slackened pace, and more and more unsteadily, when, with a suppressed groan from Tom, burden and burden-bearer sank down together. The new

motion had hardly ceased when I was comfortably resting in Tom's lap.

"Yer needs rest, sah, jes' a min't, sah," said hard-breathing and self-forgetting Tom.

"Will it last long?" I asked. Either in answer to my question or to encourage their own weary selves, as well as me, the two faithful servants commenced to sing, very softly at first, scarcely above a whisper, but with increasing melody and soothing effect. Among others most frequently repeated were the following lines:

We's mos' dar! we's mos' dar!
Doan' you see dat light shinin' froo de open do'
Cheerily vitin' us come?
Doan' you see dat hand beck'nin' from de lower step?
Oh! we's mos' welcome sure.
And we's comin', comin', comin', yes', we's comin',
And now we's almos' dar."

During all this song, which fell on my ears like a charm, the hand of Tot was passing to and fro across my temples and through my hair. My fevered and over-active brain grew quiet. I felt my nerves relaxing and the will letting go its hold on the mind; my thoughts, unhelmed, drifted out upon a calm sea; past and present were alike forgotten; and so, in the arms of strange but trusted servants, at the bottom of a subterranean passage, in utter darkness and helplessness, I rested from all care, from all responsibility. That is the last I can remember of that day's history. Oh, blessed sleep! "tired nature's sweet restorer."

CHAPTER III.

DR. LIGHTHEART AND TOT.

IT was late in the afternoon of the next day before I awoke, and my awaking was almost like a resurrection from the dead. I had never before been so far down into the depths of utter unconsciousness. The past was for the moment shut out from my memory. I had not gone so far out of myself as to lose my individuality, but still far enough to lose consciousness of my identity. My first thought, therefore, was not, I am somebody, but, Who am I? I am some one in good circumstances, I thought, as I hastily glanced at my surroundings.

I was in a luxurious bed and a richly-furnished room. I arose, and, having turned the faucets, was watching the hot and cold streams, as they mingled together in the marble basin, while my thoughts went off analogically to the warm and cold currents circling through nature and through human hearts, tempering extremes and making the earth habitable and life attractive.

"Well," I mused, "there are no disagreeable currents in this room, a fact which concerns me now more than abstract questions. How beautiful and cozy everything is! not a social icicle any-

where. There is warmth and welcome from floor to ceiling. Everything is orderly, still not the smallest thing says, in its stiffness, Don't touch me, but rather, Enjoy me as you like. The carpet, the paper, the bed and canopy over it, the curtains, the pictures, the little ornaments, all harmonize beautifully—unity in variety. There is an air of cheerfulness, contentment and sociability here, which gives me a free-and-easy, homelike feeling. Wonder if I shall find the owner as pleasing? If this is not borrowed taste, hers ought to be a harmonious and lovely character."

At this point of my soliloquy there was a knock, and, before I could decide what to do with myself, the door opened and a man of medium height, dark whiskers and hair well sprinkled with gray, and a very benevolent countenance, stood before me. After a searching glance at me he said, "Ah! excuse me, sir. I was hastily summoned, and thought your need might be urgent."

"You are a physician, I presume," said I. "Please walk in. I am glad to see you, though I hope I am not in need of medicine."

"Let me see how the human clock is keeping time," said he, placing his fingers on my wrist. "A good time-piece, but a much abused one, sir. It acts tired and as if inclined to run down. The machinery must be lubricated or it will stop. I am glad, however, to find everything favorable. I left you last night a little in doubt. The danger of settled fever is over, and what you now need is beef-

steak and rest. You have been running too fast, and, as a compensation, the dry and overheated wheels must move slowly till oiled from nature's own resources, which you have overdrawn. Keep your bed, sir, at least till to-morrow morning, when I will call. In the meantime think as little as possible, and sleep all you can. I will order breakfast sent up to you as I go out. Good-day, sir."

"But, doctor," said I, as he turned to leave, "I have a great many questions to ask."

"Not now," he replied; and then reading my thoughts before I could speak, he added, "Everything is lovely. You are in hands that delight to minister to the wants of others. In fact you are as near a local heaven as is possible in this world. You are a lucky dog, sir; so let your thoughts lie down with you, quiet and sweet as a June morning, such as I hope to-morrow will be, when I will give you a longer audience."

I stood still, looking at the door until I heard his retreating footsteps on the stairs, and then, feeling weak, I was glad to obey orders, and crawled back into bed. Though among strangers, I could not but feel peaceful and happy; for my surroundings were lovely, and the coming and going of the doctor had only heightened the beauty of the picture. It would have been difficult to experience an unpleasant emotion in that delightful chamber, and I felt for the first time how important to the sick are the impressions made by room, physician and nurse.



"I'SE NO GRAMMY."— *Page 25.*

"I am welcome and not merely tolerated here," I said to myself; "for the hands that made this room speak so kindly belong to a heart that loves the whole world."

Here came a tap at my door, and, at my bidding, in walked an apple-dumpling shaped-negress with a face round as the full moon, black as coal, and so wrapped about with white cloth as to suggest the idea of a fly in a pan of milk!

"I's brung up you dinner, sah," said she, placing it on a stand at my bedside.

"Yes," I added, "and a dinner fit for a king, too. I thank the Lord and all concerned in getting it up. What a delicious steak! It is as soft and juicy and toothsome as the most dainty connoisseur could wish. Did you cook this steak, grammy?"

"Ebery one calls me Tot. I's no grammy. I got jes' one chile in dis yere born world, and he's such a ripskeezach sort of a catamount, I mighty feared he'll nebber make ole Tot any mor'n a anxious mudder. If he grow up like he be now, he nebber can stop long nuff ter get married. He'd wanten stan on 'e head fore dey got froo de ceremony, or run out de room on he han's and feet, growlin' and snarlin' like wild cat. Why, at de funeral ob ole Marmaduke, when eberybody were cryin' and takin' on, and in de mos' solemncolly time, just as de min'ster, obercome wid streamin' tears, brought he fist kerwhack on de desk, Pomp jump right into de floor, and scampered out blartin' like scared calf."

"Well, Tot, you'll kill or cure me laughing."

"Nebber knowed nobody die laughin', sah."

"You are right, Tot; laughing is a good healthful tonic, and I shall want to hear more of Pomp hereafter, but I fear I shall split my sides with the vision you have already given of him before I finish this good meal. Tot, this is the most perfect cooking I ever enjoyed. Did you do this?"

"Yah, I cook him. I got so I can suit missus now, tank de Lord; but it tuck a heap larnin' and a power o' patience fore I does it. Missus so good I would bust ober de hot range 'fore I guvs him up. She say it fine 'complishment as playin' de pinanna an' 'portant as preachin'."

"She is right, Tot; for both music and preaching are spoiled by vile cooking in its effect on actor or listener."

"Well, missus say I should cook healthful and savory too, and she telled me how ter fix ebberything and jes de color she want in de bakin', and how dis were skience and dat were art till I gin ter tink I di'n't know nuffin 'tall scarcely, and dat it too much for Tot and I coon do 'em nohow, and I say, 'Oh, missus! you take way my bref wid so much larnin'. 'Twill take heap more brain den I got to forstan' all dat.' I was done plum gone beat. But she courage me 'bout de great art, and I fort ef I could ony hab one ob missus' fine 'complishments, I'd be jes' made, and I says, 'Tot, you can't change you leopard spots, but yer can let missus come into ye and rule ye, and so I jes



"YOU TAKE AWAY MY BREEF WID SO MUCH LARNIN'."—*Page 26.*



frowed ole Tot away and ony minded missus inside. I kept forgettin' Tot's 'stakes and minin' missus till missus inside hab ebberting her own way, and I shout victory, halleluyah! When missus hear dat and foun' I cook' em right, she put her dear purty arms roun' ole Tot's neck and kiss her ole brack face. Den I coon say nuffin, ony jes bress de Lord; and I sot right down on de flo' and had one bressed good cry. I's 'complished cook now, sah, but missus did it."

"Tot, you are a heroine."

"What's dat?"

"It is a smart, brave woman."

"Tank ye, sah."

"You conquered your ignorance and indisposition to learn; and to master one's self is the greatest victory one achieves in this world. According to the Bible, it is a greater act than to take a city."

"Reckon you and missus am alike."

"Tot, I am thinking you could not pay me a higher compliment than that. Your mistress must be a very sensible and excellent lady."

"She be all dat and more too. Oh, my! here I be talkin' like crazy coot 'ginst doctor's orders. Ye seemed so peert ye made me forget myself."

Upon this she left the room as fast as her waddling gait could carry her; and for all that day, when she appeared, as she did occasionally, to see that I wanted nothing, it was with a look of inquiry and a nod, or a few monosyllables, and that was all.

CHAPTER IV.

BREAKFAST WITH THE FAMILY.

I EARLY fell asleep that night, and slept soundly till morning; and when I awoke my room was flooded with sunshine. I looked out on a world bright and beautiful, as if new-created, and I felt as fresh as the new-born day. I was happy, too, though it would have puzzled me to know exactly why, since I was among strangers, and knew not what a day might bring forth. The secret of my happiness was doubtless largely physical, but much was due to the fact that nothing but pleasing impressions had been made upon me; and, in addition to gratitude, may there not have been a subtle revelation of a kindred spirit near by, felt and believed in, though mostly below consciousness?

Is there not in every work performed a soul, which is itself a revelation of the author? And is it not as real in so simple a matter as the arrangement of a sick-room as in the greater and more conspicuously heroic deed? May we not, in some advanced period, look back on the so-called trifles of every-day life and read in them our own characters, yes, our very souls, what we were from day to day and year to year? Be that

as it may, I was at home with the spirit of the place, felt no loneliness, and was content to await developments. Unconsciously I fell into a semi-poetic mood :

"Every act has its own spirit,
Pregnant with immortal fire,
Kindling in each passing stranger
Lofty hope or low desire."

I had been awake only a few minutes, when there came a tap at my door, and the benevolent face of Dr. Lightheart appeared.

"Ah! you are as bright as the morning," said he, "and that is saying a good deal. I think you can now do as you have a mind to, provided you keep your mind playful and utterly careless. You must not shoulder a feather's weight of responsibility for months." He added, laughing, "Next autumn, or next year, perhaps, you may break up the fallow ground. But the first breaking now in order will be to break fast! As it is late, and I am to join you and the family at table, I will at once go below and await your appearance."

I hastily dressed and was soon in the lower hall, where the doctor met me, and, leading me into the sitting-room, introduced me to the family: Rev. Dr. Blentwood, a comfortable invalid of about fifty years, prematurely gray, and somewhat careworn, but pleasant and intellectual, and Miss Ethel Blentwood, my rescuer, a remarkably healthy, rosy-cheeked girl of twenty-three summers, blending at once in her mien the intelligence of the father and the sweetness, I learned

afterwards, of the long-lamented mother. I was heartily congratulated on my recovery, and was as heartily expressing my indebtedness, when Dr. Blentwood took me by the arm, and we all repaired to the dining-room.

I was struck with what is usually termed "the blessing." Dr. Blentwood, looking toward his daughter, who sat opposite, said pleasantly and with touching simplicity, "For this beautiful morning, and the health and happiness of this hour——" Here he paused, and his daughter added with a sweet earnestness, "the Lord make us truly grateful."

"Professor Bloomfield," said Dr. Blentwood, turning to me, "that we did not visit your room on your return to consciousness, was in obedience to the strict orders of our mutual physician, Dr. Lightheart, who would allow no one to attend you but the nurse."

"As a result," broke in Dr. Lightheart, "behold him fresh as the morning, and ready for full rations."

"To Dr. Lightheart's commands as a physician," responded Dr. Blentwood, "we have all learned the unwisdom of disobedience, especially here at Graynoble."

I ventured to ask if Graynoble was the name of the town.

"No, sir," answered Dr. Blentwood; "it is what we call our home."

"Ah!" I said, noting Ethel's downcast eyes, "I was in a dazed condition when I arrived, and

thought I was passing from earth to heaven; and, really, though I was mistaken in some respects, I am most fortunate in finding myself in a home so prophetic of that place. The past few days seem still so much a dream, and though I have tried hard to penetrate their history, I do not yet fully know, Miss Blentwood, how much I am indebted to your bravery and self-sacrifice."

"Your indebtedness is very slight certainly," said Miss Ethel, coloring; "for no one used to the water as I am would have done less. Indeed I am indebted to you for lying so still and letting me pull you out of danger so easily. Had you been less manageable, I fear I could not have succeeded."

"I would like very much," I said, "to revisit the scene of my rescue and the route by which I was brought here. It is all a disconnected dream to me, indistinct and visionary, but very pleasant. It is wonderful that I have no recollection of having suffered in the least. I can recall only joyful emotions and bright anticipations. Even now there is a feeling that I may not be quite awake, and that you all may suddenly take angels' wings and fly away, leaving me only the memory of a glorious dream, or vision."

"I fear we are a little too worldly to do that just yet," said Dr. Blentwood, "though I hope, figuratively speaking, our wings are growing. Your experience must have been remarkable. I doubt, from what I myself have been cognizant, that you will ever feel quite clear whether you

were in the body or out. Paul in one of his experiences never knew."

"The visions," I responded, "are so satisfying, I would fain hold them as sent from above, whether natural or supernatural."

"Let a physician speak," said Dr. Lightheart. "Mr. Bloomfield enters his boat tired out bodily and mentally, almost exhausted, his mind filled with sweet thoughts of rest, the most blessed boon imaginable in his condition, and, while watching the beautiful scenery along shore, falls, through something like sleep—almost lethargic—into unconsciousness, from which he only partially arouses to see Ethel looking at him, whom by degrees his fevered brain and consequent over-excited imagination places beyond the dark river as an inhabitant of the Celestial City—all explained naturally."

"Because you know that snow is only frozen mist," asked Dr. Blentwood, "does that do away with the fact that there is such a thing as snow?"

"Certainly not," answered Dr. Lightheart.

"Then," continued Dr. Blentwood, "because you think you know the path in which Professor Bloomfield's mind travelled up from the physical to a high spiritual state, does that do away with the possible fact that he did enjoy things beyond the ken of the ordinary working of mind in matter? But the particular point I wish to make is, that God was in his experience, whatever it was. The very fact that it has given him spiritual comfort is proof of this. God is as much in the

natural as in the supernatural, in the small as in the great things of life. They are only parts of one grand whole. We are too apt to shut God out from all we can in any measure comprehend. Because we see a little of His method in the natural world, we think we see all.

"Again, what kind of a God would He be who worked without method? That we can calculate beforehand, to a moment, the rising or setting sun and the procession of the seasons or an eclipse, only proves that the God of the universe is a God of order and stability. What we call natural law is only another name for the regularity of God's procedure, a method to be depended upon. It will be well for the human race when men's observation shall be sufficiently broad and deep to bring them back and up to the simplicity of seeing God in all things, in the little gettings-on in life and in the expected as well as unexpected."

"How much comfort and real rest of faith," I here ventured to assert, "one loses who thus fails to see His hand everywhere and in everything!"

"Yes, indeed," answered Dr. Blentwood, "and conscious help, too."

"What!" broke in Dr. Lightheart, "does not God help the man who does not recognize His presence as well as the man who does?"

"He helps all His creatures, sending untold blessings on the just and the unjust alike; but can you not see that they, who recognize, believe in, and are conscious of God's gifts, are the only

ones who are really helped spiritually? Belief draws aside spiritual curtains and opens spiritual doors, letting God's blessings into the soul. Unbelief shuts out the light and warmth of His presence and makes that soul, spiritually, a dungeon."

"Then, man can successfully resist God?"

"Yes, by receiving the penalty of that resistance in his own soul."

"Does that penalty relieve God of responsibility? Is He not a father still, with all the tremendous responsibilities of a father?"

Dr. Blentwood hesitated a moment and then replied, "I think, Dr. Lightheart, God cannot and does not rest with the penal consequences of sin. Though we are on ground where we should tread lightly and reverently, I cannot answer otherwise than that He has responsibilities as a Creator; and I fully believe He cannot fail to discharge every obligation towards the most wayward of His children."

"Very well," continued Dr. Lightheart, "what I fail to see is, how His obligation can stop short of the complete blessedness of every human being."

"Are you not losing sight of the rights of man?"

"What rights?"

"The right to receive or reject any gift, whether from God or man."

"It seems to me a man's right to be lost is one he would willingly forego."

"I think not, Dr. Lightheart; every man prizes his freedom above everything else, and I think I can say with reverence that the infinite God bows in humble recognition of every right with which He has constituted us. If any man is lost it will be because God has respected his rights and not that He has violated them. Jesus recognizes man's right to reject Him when He says, 'How often would I. . . . but ye would not.'"

"Is it not as much a violation of man's rights to punish him against his will as it would be to save him against his will?"

"What reason have you that God does either?"

"Will a man go to hell willingly?"

"Yes, if he is more fitted for hell than heaven. Why not? He would prefer to go where the society would be most congenial to him, would he not?"

"Certainly," Dr. Lightheart admitted, "I see that. I notice devils prefer devilish companionship here."

"Well, then, if man is wicked and all his tastes and inclinations are low and away from God, he could not feel at home in heaven. He would prefer the society of those who thought and felt as he did."

"Well, admitting that to be true, what are you going to do with the good man of fine taste and high sense of honor, who somehow leaves God out of his thoughts?"

"Can a man be good and not love a good being like God?"

"No; but the man I wish to bring before you does love the good wherever he finds it and affiliates with it, but not being able to define God, his thoughts do not rest there, but go out practically and helpfully towards those in flesh and blood whom he knows about. What are you going to do with him? Is he not better prepared for heaven than the person who says he loves God, and doubtless thinks so, but shows none of that love towards his fellow-men and, perhaps, is full of unjust criticism and fault-finding towards his neighbors?"

"To answer in the shortest manner, I do not believe God is such a devotee to red tape as to be deceived by a mere technical adherence to outward forms, or that the man himself will always be deceived. It seems to me eminently reasonable that every man will go to his own place, where he is most fitted to go, as naturally and as surely as birds of a feather flock together."

"Are there, then, degrees of misery as well as happiness in the next world?"

"If there are here, why not there? The soul at death does not die; it is only separated from the coarser body, and is the same soul still. Change of location does not change character."

"Then, Dr. Blentwood, there must be a wide range of misery and happiness, and at the dividing line, those who have the least heaven and those who have the least hell in their hearts, must be pretty near together."

"The dividing line, Dr. Lightheart, will be the

love line. What a man loves determines his character. If he loves God, he acts from the highest motive, loves everything good and beautiful, and his neighbor as himself; and between him and one who does not so love, it seems to me there is a great gulf."

"Precisely, I believe that, for there are gulfs both great and small between men here, though we see them bridged almost constantly, and I believe they will be bridged hereafter. But I would like to know what is to become of the lowest Christian in the next world, according to orthodoxy."

"Well, being on the right side of the love-line, the line of progress, as the corporal in the army once bragged of himself, or as he termed it the line of promotion, though starting from the lowest heaven, having a little love, which is a little life, said Christian may go on to the highest heaven or everlasting bliss."

"And what of the wicked?"

"Many think they will go away waxing worse and worse, till they descend into the lowest hell, or are annihilated."

"And what do you think, Dr. Blentwood?"

"I can only say that the tendency of selfishness is to separate more and more, combining only for selfish ends; and the worst state I can conceive of is that of a soul becoming so selfish as to neither love nor trust anybody, voluntarily shutting himself up to solitary gloom."

"But before he reaches this sad state, if such

a state be possible, which I very much doubt, may he not repent and receive God's love, and so pass to the line of progress, or, in Scripture phrase, from the left to the right hand of the Father?"

"Never, never," shouted a sharp voice through the open dining-room door. It was the voice of Mrs. Lightheart, who had been in the sitting-room, impatiently awaiting the entrance of the family, but hearing her creed assailed, could wait no longer. She continued, "The wicked shall go away into everlasting misery—into a lake of fire and brimstone and be tortured with everlasting burning, the smoke of their torment always ascending with the howls of devils dancing around and stirring up the fires—that's my belief."

"My wife, you see," said Dr. Lightheart, ironically, "is much given to the satisfying delights of sweet reasonableness! The fact is," he added laughing, "she is an intense literalist; and the way I came to marry her was her mistaking a piece of poetry I quoted as a real, literal pop of the question! Being caught, I made the best of it, and with great fortitude gave myself up at once as lost to all the comforts of single blessedness, though I have hankered for them ever since!"

This brought down the house, and amid the general laughter all rose from the table and entered the sitting-room.

CHAPTER V.

ETHEL BLENTWOOD.

AFTER Dr. and Mrs. Lighthouse had left, I said, as best I could, to Dr. and Miss Blentwood, that I was under great and lasting obligation to them for their exceeding kindness, and that I was in much perplexity how to even express, much less discharge, the great debt of gratitude I felt and should always continue to feel. I found it hard to recognize the fact that this place, so full of charming associations was not my rest, my home, but that I must leave it in a few short hours. The pictures here formed in my mind would ever remain to influence my whole life. My voice trembled; for I felt deeply what I said.

Dr. Blentwood approached and took me warmly in both his hands, saying, "My dear sir and brother, we are abundantly paid already for our part in this agreeable episode in our life. So, permit us to feel under obligation to you for your involuntary visit and the unexpected pleasure of an agreeable acquaintance. I assure you, if our meeting has been pleasant to you it has been doubly so to us. We cannot think of your leaving to-day. Besides, it would not be prudent. I

must be in my study for an hour, and then, if agreeable to you and Ethel, we will visit the scene of your rescue."

Reading the same cordial welcome in the softly lustrous eyes of Miss Blentwood, I responded, "Dr. Blentwood, I felt that I had trespassed too long already on your generous hospitality. But your cordiality convinces me that you mean what you say, and I gladly remain over till to-morrow.

Playfully patting my shoulder, Dr. Blentwood said, "To-morrow is a doubtful quantity, but if it arrives, and Dr. Lightheart says you may go and you feel that you must, we shall have to yield to the inevitable; but permit us to hope that you will remain and make our home your home as long as it will serve your health and convenience," and so saying he retired.

Miss Blentwood followed him to the next room, and I saw her adjust his necktie, and then, looking up to him with loving admiration, put up her mouth for a kiss, which was mutually given. She immediately returned, and to relieve her from the delicacy of adding anything to her father's welcome, I spoke first, saying that I found myself much in love with her father—that though I had seen him but a few hours, I felt that I already knew him thoroughly,

"I am glad to hear you say that," she replied; "for I do think so much of my father, I want everybody else to appreciate him as well. He is always transparent and true. Never having

anything to cover up, he never puts on an exterior different from his inmost feeling."

"He seems to be one who doeth good by stealth, and would blush to find it fame," I said.

"It is but simple justice," she went on, "to say that however many may know of his good deeds, he himself never knows them."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "right there is the secret of the Scripture injunction to let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth. It will not hurt us if the whole world knows the good we do, provided we keep it from ourselves. It is this making note of our good acts and taking credit for them, which nurtures spiritual pride and spoils us, as it did the Pharisees of old."

"How much that sounds like father!" she said innocently. "He has always taught me that we owe service to our fellow-creatures, and his life has so fully and sweetly illustrated that principle, that it does not seem to be at all like living to sacrifice nothing for the happiness of others. Indeed, I have so grown up in the warm atmosphere of domestic tranquillity and a love which means service, that when I go into a home where the opposite principle predominates, I feel such a chill and shrinking back, as if coming into the house of death! I can almost see the icy fingers clutching the hearts of the inmates and freezing every pulsation, and I ache to say or do something to bring them into the warmth and joy

of real life. Perhaps my talk seems strange to you?"

"Not a bit of it," I replied. "If strange it is the strangeness of truth forcibly put, with which I fully sympathize. Whatever one may call the picture of the garden of Eden, whether allegory or fact, there can be nothing truer than that Adam died the moment he selfishly desired to appropriate the only fruit, which did not belong to him, and which God had forbidden him to touch. Selfishness *is* moral death. God asks us then a most reasonable thing when He asks us to deny self; that is, give up selfishness which is death, and become partakers of the divine nature, which is love or self-sacrifice, in other words, life. If physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, or the coarser body (to recognize Swedenborgianism), then it is proper to call the separation of the soul from God—the loss of centrifugal force as a balance—spiritual death."

"You would say, then, that he who is farthest from God is the most selfish, whether called saint or sinner," she half asked and half asserted.

"It seems to me self-evident," I replied. "God is love and love is self-sacrifice, and hence, he, who is farthest from Him, is farthest from sacrificing anything for others, and, therefore, is deepest in selfishness."

"How do you explain the apparent selfishness of so-called Christians, often greater than so-called worldly people?" she asked.

"The name, Christian," I answered, "is often misapplied and sadly abused. But we must bear in mind that selfishness is one thing and its manifestation another, the latter varying with individual ambitions and aims. The most satanic selfishness may put on the garb of pure benevolence for a purpose. One man asks of an action only, How will it affect my social or political standing? Another thinks only of God as the perfect standard and the rectitude of his own conscience. Some spend money freely, because they do not value it, as some squander their honor for the same reason. Others, again, are indifferent to everything except the present, like Esau, very pleasant animals, but incapable of denying themselves or others where pleasure is concerned. We are in a world of mixed motives, and it is very difficult to penetrate to the springs of action; but if we look patiently and long enough, I think we shall generally find the evidence which Jesus meant when he said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'

"A further explanation may be found in the fact that some start in the Christian life very low down, and though having a little love, that love has more to contend with in reaching its fruitage than with others. We must admit, I suppose, in view of the Old Testament worthies, that it takes but a very little grace to save a man or to begin in him a work of reformation; and hence, it is not strange in the battle between the new and old life that some of the old selfishness

should appear occasionally." I saw that she wished to speak, and I paused.

"Your remarks, Professor Bloomfield," she said, with a pleased countenance, "have cleared away a cloud of difficulties, and I thank you very much. I shall now find it much easier to be charitable towards the lowest and most unattractive Christian. I fear I have not made due allowance for the difference of inherited tendencies and training. I do pity the cross-grained and ill-conditioned, but do I love them? I try to find their good qualities and be drawn to them thereby, but I find it hard work."

"You are not required to do impossibilities, Miss Blentwood. We talk flippantly about love, as if it were something we could control by mere will-power. By no possibility can you love what to you is unlovely. God Himself does not."

"Who, then, can stand? for are we not all unlovely in His pure sight?"

"Only comparatively, I think. He sees in us the embryonic seed as fully developed, which even to Him is lovely, and, so, loves this perfect germ, however small, and the ideal He is working out in each one of His children."

"I see; but does He not love the impenitent sinner, who has not received this divine attractiveness?"

"Not with the love of complacency. He can only love such with the love of pity or benevolence—not cold, but warm, actively helpful, persevering, infinite."

"May not even His benevolence be greater than anything we call love?"

"Undoubtedly it is a thousand-fold more beneficent. Love is a variable quantity, meaning more or less according to the inward state of the individual. How infinite the difference, for example, between what the lowest and the highest man means by it! Again, how much more God puts into the word than the noblest and best of earth! So that when one says, I love, he may mean something almost entirely different from another who says the same thing." I thought I detected a slight blush overspreading her countenance, and the thought flashed upon me that perhaps she had recently had those two words addressed to her. The idea, to my surprise, pained me, and I unconsciously paused.

She broke the silence by saying, "I think we have to know people to understand how much their professions mean, even when sincerely uttered."

I looked up and thought I saw the same blush, as if a double consciousness was going on in her mind, produced by personal experience.

Whether this was so or not, she immediately excused herself, and retired from the room.

Hitherto I had been interested chiefly in her fine mental qualities and her refreshing, open, innocent simplicity. There was an atmosphere about her of winning restfulness and genial warmth, which charmed me from the first; but

now, as she arose to retire, I had time to note her extreme loveliness of face and figure, her easy carriage and grace of manner.

She moved

“As if her body were instinct with thought
Moulded to motion by music's waves.”

As she departed, I involuntarily murmured, “There goes the most beautiful girl I ever saw, mentally, morally, spiritually and physically. What a blessing she will bring to the man to whom she gives her heart! If worthy of her, he will have an ever-present heaven. Her love will mean so much! It will be crowded and instinct with uplifting force and life. If her future husband does not strive with all his might to be, for her sake, the most appreciative and best possible man, he will be either a rascal or a fool. Hers, like divine love, must be transforming, unless it falls, as sometimes does God's sunshine, on the flinty rock which can give back no response. What if, deceived by her own reflected light, her love does so fall, and she is tied down to a dead man—dead in all his higher nature, though he speaks and moves with all the appearance of life!”

The thought made me shudder. No, no, I argued with myself, though innocent and very sympathetic, she has too much judgment and is too sensitive to the presence of evil not to be repelled from the selfish and the stony-hearted;

and she will be drawn only to one, who, like herself, is good and true to the heart's core.

Then I began to speculate on the mission of such a pair.

CHAPTER VI.

A WALK WITH ETHEL.

WHAT should the happiest and best couple on earth do? I soon found to be a question which led into infinite depths, and was relieved of it by the entrance of Dr. Blentwood and his winsome, fascinating daughter. I was much struck with the moral beauty of the picture they presented, the quiet, unobtrusive happiness, the implicit trust in each other, the perfect sympathy love so clearly but unconsciously expressed in and every movement, and the grand spirituality which glorified their every feature. The picture was to me, especially winning now, having just come, in the interest of education, from a world of business, which is too much and needlessly a world of diplomacy and deceit.

"Well, Professor Bloomfield," said Dr. Blentwood cheerfully, "I have dropped off the harness of toil, and now shall we take that little outing?"

"If you please," I answered, rising. "I am naturally anxious to see how I came here. I feel as if I had been suddenly let into your restful paradise, and have only a confused and very indefinite idea where I left the world of care and fatigue in which I had been laboring so long."

At the door the doctor was detained by a caller, and so Ethel and I were permitted to walk on "slowly." This permission was very agreeable to me, though I liked the doctor's company; for Miss Ethel's voice had a sweet fascination about it and an accent so soft and tender that I loved to hear her talk. It was one of those rare voices, one hears once in a lifetime, which seems attuned to the melody of a higher order of being, and which, entering the ear, lingers and echoes through all the chambers of the soul like a pleasant memory, a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

I was glad to be out of doors; for the sky was clear except a few fleecy clouds sailing on a sea of blue, and everything was resplendent with that peculiar glory which a June morning alone can give.

"What beautiful scenery!" I was forced to exclaim when we had left the house behind us and I had turned to view it. "You are, indeed, happily situated. This is the first time I have seen your house on the outside."

"Which," asked Miss Blentwood, "do you like the better?"

"The inside," I replied. There is a mingled quaintness and picturesqueness about the exterior, and certain homelike touches in the surroundings which I like very much; but the real spirit and beauty of home is better expressed within. There is a glow of warm heart-welcome in the entire interior arrangement, which seems to say

to me as I enter, 'Come in ; everything here is yours without reserve.' So, you see there is about as much difference between the exterior and interior of your home, as there is between looking at a luscious cherry and eating it !"

She looked up for a moment, but long enough for me to see a soft gladness lying in her limpid eyes.

"Well," she said, "I think the interior of a home *should* say that, though I fail to make ours talk as I would like."

"That is because your heart is larger than your expression of it. In other words, you mean more than you say ; and, in fact, that is just what your home indicates." She laughed a gentle little laugh.

I went on, "A home should not lie. I have been in homes which had a great deal of money scattered about in costly furnishings, and at first they seemed to say, 'This luxury is for your enjoyment, if you will only stop with us ;' but looking deeper I felt that it was all false, and that at heart they only meant, 'Look, admire, and then go about your business.'"

"Such deception is felt rather than seen, is it not ?"

"Yes, one may be intellectually pleased, but feeling the lack of soul he becomes chilled, and before he gets out of the house, sighs for a great-coat and mittens, though in the middle of July."

"How do you account, Professor Bloomfield,

for this feeling—this sensitiveness to the varied moral atmosphere pervading different homes?"

"It is hard to analyze; but I think it comes from the character of the inmates. In one way or another the very walls reflect the spirit of the life there lived."

"Is not something due to skill in making home attractive?"

"Certainly, Miss Blentwood, but it is the skill of the heart rather than the head. An honest and loving heart will find out and apply to the needs of home more comforting things than all the cold intellects that could be brought together."

"Is it the motive, then, revealed behind the arrangement of home, rather than the things contained in it, that give us pleasure or displeasure?"

"Mostly, I think; though, of course, something may be accorded to the mere material. Some homes, like the people occupying them, are heartless, and the motive for their existence lies in selfish pride. Others, on the contrary, in every article and attitude declare themselves wholly for your happiness, and nothing for display."

"I certainly have felt all you say, Professor Bloomfield, but the logical process by which the feeling was produced I may not have clearly detected."

"That is because it was too quick for you. The logic of the heart will always outrun the logic of the head, as the loving John outran the headstrong Peter to the tomb of Jesus."

She was thoughtful for a moment, and then said, "Of course an act, in itself admirable, loses its beauty when prompted by an evil purpose."

"Exactly," I said. "Whatever minor loveliness may be accorded to transactions or things, it is the design which speaks through them, at home or elsewhere, which draws or repels."

"Would you say that a sense of the beautiful everywhere and always comes to us through a similar process?"

"I think so, even from memory or association. What is it in sculpture, painting, or nature that produces in us an emotion of beauty? Is it the marble or paint or coloring matter? What makes this landscape of open fields and sylvan dells, stretching out before us as we walk, glorious? Is it not, as in a work of art, the design, the ideal suggested, the spirit which animates and speaks through it?"

"Then you would say that all beauty is chiefly immaterial or spiritual?"

"Chiefly, I think, Miss Blentwood. It is the soul in things, living, breathing, speaking. In other words, it is the ideal or meaning which touches us and makes us say, 'Oh, how beautiful!' To illustrate, you have seen a human face faultless in outline and coloring, which you could not call beautiful, because it meant nothing. Such a face is attractive, if at all, only to another soulless idiot like its owner."

"To branch a little from the subject, though suggested by it, I am reminded of Swedenborg,

who teaches, I think, that every tree and other natural object is only the material expression of a soul which shall live hereafter !”

“Whether that be true or not, certainly every object of nature has in it an idea, a spiritual meaning—in other words, *is* the expression of a spiritual thought, the thought God had in making it ; and thus it is, as some one has said, we may ‘read God’s thoughts after Him.’”

“But, Professor Bloomfield, is there anything unreasonable in the supposition that these thoughts of God, expressed in flowers, shrubs, trees, birds, may be permanent or everlasting thoughts, and that we shall meet them again hereafter, expressed in more refined form and as much more beautiful than we now see them, as we expect our bodies to be?”

“You put that thought very finely, Miss Blentwood, and frankly I see nothing unreasonable about it. Do you believe it?”

“Oh !” blushing, “it is something one can hardly believe or disbelieve, I think. It strikes me as a very pretty and pleasant idea—that’s all.”

“How?” I asked, wishing to draw her out.

“Oh, it helps me to think what the other world is like. If everything pleasant here is the representation of a real spiritual life, then the other better world must be similar to this, only infinitely refined and beautified ; and, when I get there, I shall not feel so far from home or so much a stranger in a strange land.”

At this moment our attention was drawn to a tree about ten feet tall, covered with beautiful blossoms, and approaching us without any visible power to carry it, as if, in proof of some Darwinian theory, it had ambitiously cut loose from the soil, and was trying a life of locomotion! After the first breath of surprise, I said laughingly, Miss Blentwood joining:

"That makes me think of 'Birnam wood,' though it must be on a more peaceful mission."

The tree suddenly stopped, and a black head, followed by a body, emerged from the branches which had completely enveloped him, and, seeing us, he let down his precious burden gently on the grass.

"Our Tom!" said Miss Blentwood with a pleased look, "and a noble old man he is. He has but one fault, an amusing one, quite common I think among recent slaves, and that is a strange pride in using uncommon words and phrases, apparently inventing a word when none comes to hand to suit him. Occasionally he will strike out or stumble upon an original thought which I find worth carrying away, and thinking about."

As we approached Tom took off his hat and put it under his arm, as he used to do when a slave in the presence of a white person, and stood grinning and ducking his head, till we came up. This, I afterwards found was a special mark of politeness, enacted only to those he believed were very respectable. He touched his hat to everybody, took it off to little better people, tucked

it under his arm to nicer people still, and when specially pleased to see them, he would in addition grin and duck his head.

"O, Tom!" she exclaimed smiling, "you almost frightened us. Did it not hurt your feelings to cut so beautiful a tree?"

"It did twingle-twinge me some, Miss Ethel, at *fust*," said he, putting great emphasis on the "fust," "it look so lubly enough to grow in de garden ob de Lord; but I say, Booful tree, I want you for de chosen ob de Lord. Is not you willin' to gib yourself to happify Miss Ethel? Nuffin' too good for her, be dar? Den, when I mention dat name, de tree seem to smile all ober and say, I's ony too willin' to lib or die for to happify Miss Ethel, and den I cut him down widout any funder obfuscation."

We both had to laugh, but she did not forget to cast an appreciating look upon Tom for his kind efforts to serve her, which made him chuckle with much satisfaction.

As Dr. Blentwood had not overtaken us, we sat down on the grass to await his coming and to engage Tom in conversation. As we did so I managed to sly a greenback into Tom's coat-pocket and said, "Tom, this is the first opportunity I have had to thank you, which I do most heartily, for your kindness on the night of my arrival here."

"You is bery welcome, Massa Boomfield, bery. I is glorified to see you well once mo'. I fort dat night dat de bref ob life were mose clean

done gone outer ye, and dat you were sailin' ober to tudder sho' for sure. But in de silent watches ob de night I seen a glory shinin' roun' you boat, and, though de black waves run high and de death winds were drivin' you fast, you boat mistiferously turn roun' and come back to dis yere country; and it come for a purpose, Massa Boomfield. I knowed it; for I seen it. I shall not lib to see de actuality, ony de incipency, but on tudder side I will climb de golden stair, and witness de bressed consummation. I mun interfere wid de prophetic idee by telling any mo' cept ony jes' this, if ye pray by de dyin' bedside ob ole Tom, ye may know dat de glorious vision will come quick to pass." The ole man bowed his head, much shaken by his emotions; but soon raised it again, smiling through his tears, and simply added, "I is satisfied and happified."

Not knowing what else to say, and to relieve the embarrassment, I said, "Tom, where did you find that beautiful tree?"

"On de hill yonner, sah; dey mos'ly grow on de sidehills. Some ob dem bear white blossom and some pink. Peers like folks dunno what name to give em; but we call em mountain laurel."

"Did that tree really speak to you, Tom?"

"Yes, sah, evything speak to me ob de Lord and his lub."

"Anything more?"

"Sometime a heap. It pends whedder I is ual to de situation. For circumstance, if I and

de mountain or de tree or de flower am in de same mood and our hearts beat togedder, den I can open de do' and walk right into de private audience room, and hab a mos' bressed confabulation, sah, a mos' bressed confabulation."

"I am afraid, Tom, you get more out of nature than I do."

"Dat be possible, sah, for dis yere reason dat I find in my own sperience, which am dat larnin' create, sometimes, a cyclogical difficulty discomboberatin' and obfuscatin' de perception. Nature hab a anthromorphic voice only for de chile-like and de poetic simpleton, so to speak, sah."

"Well, Tom, can you tell us if there will be flowers in Heaven?"

"I is sure of it, sah."

"How?"

"I may not be able to splain de location ob my faculties on dat ar' pint, but i shall sartin see 'em up dar."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, Massa Boomfield, am de Lord goin' to take back any good thing he make for us, as if he made a 'stake, specially de flowers, which am de smile ob de Lord—de expression ob His heart? Am de Lord not goin' to smile in de nex' world?"

"But you may be so changed as not to need the flowers in Heaven."

"Den, sah, I shall not be Tom, and, to all tense and purposes I shall not be dar. Where shall I be?"

"If there is not continuity enough to preserve your identity and keep you still Tom, I admit it will be practical annihilation. But you will know yourself, Tom, and I have no doubt there will be something in the next life to correspond with flowers—something to meet the want they supply here."

"You say somethin' to correspond wid 'em, Massa Boomfield; dat may be clear nuff to de larned lik yousef', but to me—member I say to me, Massa Boomfield—dat lack definization, and be too immaticular and scatterin' for my poor heart to seize on. I wants de flowers, sah, deir bery selves."

"You will be willing to see something much more beautiful, will you not?"

"Dey good nuff for me as dey is; but if de Lord please to make 'em finer I is willin', as I hope to be finer up dar mysef; but I want to cognize 'em as de same, so when I meet de peony, de violet, de rose, de pink, et cetra, I shall know 'em as a ole acquaintance, and not find 'em so stuck up as to gib me de shivers ober a friend lost for-ebber."

"Oh, Tom," cried Miss Blentwood, "do sing for us, 'Should old acquaintance be forgot.'"

"Yes, do," I added, "it will cap the climax to your very fine argument. I am delighted that you can sing it—the very song for the occasion."

Tom was evidently pleased and readily commenced a negro version of the above-mentioned song. He was in the mood, and soon forgot all

about us, so lost was he in his own deep and powerful emotions. There was little or nothing of the familiar song after the first line except its repetition. His voice, or as it seemed voices, so quickly did it change from far to near, rose and fell unbroken, like the waves of mid-ocean after a storm, descending at times to a mere whisper, when I could distinguish only disconnected words such as "gwine away . . . , good-bye . . . , nebber forget." Then all sound would cease for an instant, and commence again far off, and, as if imitating a return of the tide of life, slowly swell louder and louder in volume and power, but never so high as to break the melody.

All this time there was so much action of hands, feet, and whole body, that I was at first amused, then charmed, and finally carried away on the swelling tide of the old man's feelings. The waves flowed in upon me so hard, they had to be bailed out at the eyes, and I began to question my ability to reach dry land gracefully! I felt rather foolish till, looking up, I saw another bark had been floundering in the same pathetic sea, but now looking all the more beautiful from the washing of the tide. I sprang to my feet and grasped her hand before I thought what I was doing, and said, "You look as if you were going right up into heaven, Miss Blentwood. Please don't leave us yet."

She smiled and blushed; Tom chuckled, and then we all laughed—laughed ourselves back to the hillside, whence we had been swept away by the musical flood.

CHAPTER VII.

OVERTAKEN BY DOCTOR BLENTWOOD.

WE were thanking Tom when Miss Blentwood exclaimed, "Why, there is father at last." And, sure enough, he was right upon us.

"I hope you will excuse my long delay," said he, "for I got away as soon as I could from a parishioner who had pressing business."

Tom, with his flowery burden, resumed his journey homeward, while the doctor, his daughter and myself started on our circuitous way to the river. We passed up a little higher to the brow of the hill to get a more extended view of the country, which disclosed a beautiful valley of cultivated fields, orchards, woods, and the suburbs of the town, on the outskirts of which nestled the lovely home of Dr. Blentwood, with its trees, walks, lawns and grapery, and the river, not too far off, smiling in the sunshine. We descended to a round clump of pitch-pine trees, which loaded the air with a grateful fragrance, and sat down on some rustic seats the doctor had placed there.

"I sometimes think," said the doctor, "if I could live here continuously, I should get well and strong. Before the sun has drunk up the

dew, I have found the air under these trees so laden with healing balm as to produce in me a grateful sensation at every breath. I occasionally prepare a sermon here; but by the force of habit I can think and write easier in my study surrounded by my books and pictures, which create around me a sort of literary and religious atmosphere. The law of association is strong with me."

After filling our lungs with long, deep breaths of this aromatic air, suggesting to Miss Blentwood the lines of Milton: Here

" Gentle gales,
Fanning their odoriferous wings, dispense
Native perfumes,"

we descended to the river and out to a projecting point of land, the right arm of a bay, within which I recognized my boat at anchor near the shore. I looked at it and then at Miss Blentwood, and asked, "Where was I when — when you first saw me?"

"About there," she answered, pointing her finger. "At first I thought the boat empty, but soon discovered a person, apparently asleep, lying in the stern. You were so far inland that I saw you would be dashed on the rocks and overturned, and I tried to awaken you by singing, and finally shouted as loud as I could; but you did not move, and, not daring to wait longer, I plunged in, and reached you in season to tow you into this little harbor. It was not much of a feat, but was opportune."

I gazed long at the rapids, and saw clearly that my boat could not have lived in them, and that in my then helpless condition I must have been drowned had I entered them, and, not daring to look upon her beautiful face, yet feeling the magnetism of her presence, I continued my gaze towards the whirling, tumbling waters till, mastering my emotions, I said :

" Miss Blentwood, you saved my life. Whether it was worth saving the future alone can reveal ; but, whatever its value, I owe it to your providential presence, to your noble courage, to——"

" Please don't," she interrupted, evidently wishing to blunt the edge of my sense of obligation ; it was a very simple thing to do, and no one whose cowardice was not of the meanest type would have done less. I was glad, however, that my father had taught me how to swim when a child."

I was thinking of my own recent experiences, but roused myself to add, " If the laws of nature were more reverently and obediently studied as the laws of God, accidents on land or sea might become almost unknown."

" Why are we put into a world of such unyielding laws and dire penalties?" asked Miss Blentwood.

" To prevent us, by learning the nobility of obedience, from being self-centered and wilful," replied her father, and then added solemnly, " It is amazing, when we come to think of it sanely, how many have to be bruised by repeated punish-

ments, before they will obey the behests of their highest interests !”

We had been retracing our steps, and were now standing on the semicircular shore near my boat and the place of my landing. For a few moments I wished I were alone that I might think; but at length I said meditatively, “It seems that I left home only a few days ago, and how much—yea, how long I have lived in that time !”

“You are right,” said the doctor; “for length of time is not in itself length of life. One person may live as long in a few days as another in as many years. Not clock time but experiences, ideas, deeds, mark real life and tell how old we are. Rightly speaking, Ethel, the youngest of us, has already lived longer than Methuselah.”

“What! I older than 969 years, father? ” said Miss Blentwood, laughing. “It is rather hard to reveal a lady’s age that way.”

The doctor smiled good-naturedly, and, patting his daughter on the shoulder, he said, “I must hold to the truth that you have lived longer than Methuselah, but you are much better preserved !”

“How apt we are to think of age in the sense of decay instead of maturity, breadth of experience and knowledge !” I remarked.

“Swedenborg has a very pretty idea on that point,” said Miss Ethel. “In his vision, or entrance into the other world, he found that the oldest person in heaven was the youngest. ’

The doctor, looking at his watch, declared it was time to be moving towards dinner.

We clambered up the bank, where Tom had borne me in my helplessness, and walked leisurely along a winding path, occasionally stopping to admire a beautiful view of the river and other scenery, or to inspect a peculiar growth of wood, when we came to a high wall, which recalled, as from a dream, my thoughts of purgatory and descent where Tom, exhausted, sank with me in his arms to the ground, and he and Tot had sung me to sleep so self-forgetfully. Turning to the left, descending a flight of stone steps, we entered a subterranean passage of ancient construction, thought to have been used by early settlers as a refuge from the Indians. This, by the aid of a little masonry, vines and climbing roses, the doctor and his daughter had converted into a thing of picturesque beauty as well as convenient passage-way from that side of their house.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SURPRISE.

AS we emerged from this umbrageous cavern I was charmed and delighted by the unexpected scene spread out before me. Over the mouth of the grotto and along the wall on my right hung vines and flowers in beautiful festoons. A path straight ahead, lined on either side by a low hedge and occasionally overarched by trellised vines, led directly to a sort of Irving porch connecting with the house; while another path wound to the left between shrubbery and flower-beds to a clump of maple trees, amply provided with seats, on the bank of the river. Between this and another clump, and parallel with the river, were two rows of elms within which was tastefully spread a table, from the centre of which rose, with delightful effect, the top of the very tree whose loveliness I had enjoyed a few hours previous. Tom and Tot had been diligently at work all the forenoon to make the table and accessories attractive, and they certainly had succeeded.

The grotto, flower-garden, trees, table and river formed a lovely picture, and I exclaimed, "Are we in paradise? This is the best visible suggestion of it I have ever seen."

"I am glad the grounds please you," said Miss Blentwood frankly; "have you nothing to criticise?"

"Nothing," I replied. "My ideal is satisfied. I shall have to grow before I can suggest anything that will not mar rather than help the general effect, which is indeed charming. Is this your work, Miss Blentwood?"

"Partly," she answered. "Father calls this my outdoor school, and I have had full power to do anything I liked in it; and, really, I think I have received an education here, which the schools alone could not have given me. I have had to think and plan for myself—try the effect of different combinations, and study successes and failures—until I have acquired some little independence of thought and critical judgment, which, though small, are of incalculable value to me."

"Miss Blentwood," I said, with an earnestness born of admiration, "I hardly know which to congratulate most, your father for his wisdom and great good sense in providing this school, or you in the almost marvelous manner you have wrought with the materials and opportunities at your disposal. You are an artist, Miss Blentwood, with the added imagination of a poet. The picture you have drawn here with organic and inorganic matter, is exceedingly beautiful, and more crowded with suggestion and the seeds of thought than any I know by paint or brush. Your success makes me wonder why landscape gardening is not made more of a study."

"Why is it," I asked Dr. Blentwood, who that moment came up, having lagged behind studying the peculiar construction of a leaf and doubtless drawing therefrom an illustration for next Sunday's sermon, "Why is it, there is not as much enthusiastic study and artistic devotion given to the creation of the beautiful in nature as in marble or on canvas? Is not landscape gardening worthy of a place among the professions and as closely allied to the elevation and happiness of the human race."

"I think," answered Dr. Blentwood, "as a study and a lifelong calling it should take high rank. It ought to be taught too in some of our higher institutions of learning, but how to teach it practically as well as theoretically? and where? are puzzles to me."

"Might it not be added very conveniently to the curriculum of our agricultural colleges? The future farmers of our land could study it with perhaps as great a profit as any other class, and though none of them might follow it as a separate profession, it would be of incalculable advantage in making farm life attractive and rural homes more desirable, and secure to the country cultured people and the very best society."

"Very good, Professor Bloomfield; but what are you going to do with the young ladies and especially the future wives of these farmers, who need the uplift and refinement which comes from this æsthetic culture?"

"I would admit them also to the same classes

and privileges with these possible farmers, and these two movements or innovations would boom the agricultural college and make it a blessing indeed."

"I believe in your ideas, Professor Bloomfield, and if carried out somehow and somewhere, one result would be a better adornment of home surroundings which are so often wickedly, because needlessly, neglected. Our homes need not be more expensive, but they could and should be more attractive. Especially is this true in the country, where there is plenty of land to make the surroundings delightful. If the reform you have suggested could be properly and successfully inaugurated young men and women would not, as now, be educated away from the country, but towards the country."

"Were education what it should be, so that money-getting would let go its present grip, and men would ascend into their higher natures, and take time to live there, and learn what sources of enjoyment they have, how much more happiness there would be in the world!"

"Yes, yes, Brother Bloomfield, I was coming to that. Our schools and colleges really touch only a part of the man or woman they essay to educate. To be complete, education must reach and vivify the moral, æsthetical and spiritual faculties as well as the intellectual and social. Could this be thoroughly accomplished, as it must before the perfect society is reached, crime, insanity, suicide, oppression and strikes would

gradually disappear, and as you say, happiness would abound."

"I cannot see," said Miss Blentwood, who had been a most attentive listener, "what we are in this world for, if not to make others as well as ourselves better and happier."

"Well," said I, "as the first step towards this consummation so devoutly to be wished, if I had abundance of means I would purchase a hundred acres of land and materialize my idea of Paradise. I would consult the highest ideals and build a home in the midst of grounds so lovely, so full of spiritual suggestion, that no one would say, How expensive! how magnificent! but, on the contrary, every one would exclaim, How lovely! how heavenly! The buildings and grounds should speak not a word of ostentation, but volumes of æsthetic, moral, social and spiritual thought. They should appeal to the entire higher nature—to all that is noblest and best in the beholder. I would then open the doors, and make this home a source of spiritual education to thousands.

"The schools separate men by making them unequal, thereby creating divisions in families and society, which religion itself finds it hard to reunite. What we need is a system of culture which shall draw mankind together by developing the whole higher manhood and womanhood, and it should be my aim to meet this felt want by daily practical instruction in landscape gardening, the laws of health, food, clothing, economics, and in

mental, moral and spiritual philosophy. I would take special care that there should be as much heart as head culture. A person is but half educated, who has only an intellectual education. A true education should increase a man's resources for happiness as well as for action; and happiness rests on right conditions of heart, on character, rather than on head-culture. It seems strange that in this nineteenth century we have gone no farther in our ideas of education. It is true our schools and colleges are giving attention to physical culture; but the body and intellect are only parts of what we mean by manhood and womanhood. The better part would be left to starve were it not for the instruction of homes and churches. There is not a school that comprehends in its system of education the development of the whole individual."

"So far as common schools are concerned," said Dr. Blentwood, "I suppose it is the theory of the state that it has no right to carry instruction to the highest, the religious faculties."

"Why not if the stability of our government and the happiness of our citizens rest more on the character thereby secured than upon mere intellectual and physical culture? Has not the state the rights of self-preservation?"

"Certainly; but the fear is that it would infringe on the legitimate work of the church and the liberty of the individual."

"But would it necessarily, Dr. Blentwood?"

"I think not. I think there is such a thing as

spiritual science, which may be taught so as to draw out and enlarge and enrich the higher faculties of the soul, without touching denominational or sectarian lines, and without any union of church and state.

CHAPTER IX.

AN OUTDOOR DINNER.

TURNING to me, Miss Blentwood said, "Thinking it would be a pleasure for you to meet our esteemed friend and physician, Dr. Lightheart, once more before departing, we have invited him and Mrs. Lightheart to dine with us."

Although I was hoping to have Ethel's society more exclusively, I appreciated the motive prompting the invitation, and made my acknowledgments accordingly. I had hardly finished before she was hurrying to welcome the newcomers, and we all met at the table at the same time.

Dr. Lightheart, with a cordial grasp of the hand, expressed gladness at seeing me so well.

"You could not have been laid up for repairs in a more delightful spot or in better society," said he, borrowing a phrase from the ship-yard and looking at me quizzically.

I felt the blood rushing to my cheeks, and, without daring to look at Miss Ethel, or even to look up, I answered, "True, Dr. Lightheart, but had this been a dreary place it would be so much easier to leave it."

Tom, as spokesman for Tot, who was evidently



"DE DINNER 'AM WAITIN' YO' 'MEDIATE CONSIDERATION." — *Page 72.*



afraid the quality of her meal might suffer from further delay, bowing his most graceful bow, said, "De dinner am waitin' you immediate consideration, and de sooner de deglutition take place de better you will esteem de cook."

Tom grinned as if he had got off a good speech, and we all with smiling faces gathered around the table, and while standing Dr. Blentwood repeated the following passage of Scripture: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

Miss Blentwood added, "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

The outdoor air so soft and balmy, the beautiful table, delightful scenery, pleasant company, cheerful conversation, and the rebound of my physical nature towards health, filled me at once with pleasure.

I was not at that time aware that a new life was already springing up within me, like the seed in the warm earth before its tiny blade is observed unfolding above the surface.

"People are differently constituted," said Dr. Lightheart, after we were seated, "and all rules have their exceptions, I suppose; but it is evidently God's law that we should eat in company, and I don't think it safe to break it. He has set the race in families, and I believe families also should mingle together oftener than they do at the festive board on occasions like this for the sake of good cheer and good digestion. One thing is certain, a dyspeptic should rarely dine alone or in dull company."

I ventured to look at Miss Blentwood, hoping she would speak, not so much, perhaps, for the sake of her ideas as for the soft tones and varied inflection of her utterances, which had come to fall on my ears with all the charm of musical notes. Whether there was an electrical communication or not, our eyes met, and I said :

"Agreeable emotions, I infer, not only promote good digestion and longevity, but have a moral mission as well."

"And, therefore," Miss Blentwood responded, "housekeeping should be studied as an art, and good food, like fine jewels, should have attractive settings."

"Amen!" almost shouted Dr. Lightheart. "The future reformer will begin back of penal institutions and rescue missions in the home."

"Exactly," said Dr. Blentwood, "every human being has or should have the right of being well born, and then the right to healthy food and clean air and sunlight, and an occasional view, at least, of nature dressed in her most lovely apparel."

"On this account," said Miss Blentwood, "the outing given to the poor children every summer must be a duty as well as an inspiration and blessing to them."

"Yes," responded her father, "but the older poor should be included in these outings. The change from foul basements to the verdant hills and sweet valleys and native woods would give them a new lease of life, physically and morally."

and this, followed by improvement of home environment and wise Christian instruction, would do much towards emptying police stations, jails and prisons."

"I think," said Mrs. Lightheart, who had hitherto said but little, "low people are foreordained to be the coarse, ill-bred, reprobate creatures they are, and so good for nothing except as hewers of wood and drawers of water and a warning to others, and your puny efforts can't change them."

"God can," said Dr. Blentwood.

"True, but why don't He?"

"Perhaps it is because you and I and others haven't done our duty."

"Are we necessary to His work, Dr. Blentwood?"

"Perhaps not, but work for others is a necessary schooling for us, and if we neglect it we may be no better than those we affect to despise."

"How can that be?"

"Well, Mrs. Lightheart, you and I may daily grow better without effort."

Dr. Lightheart interrupted, "my wife can't."

This was laughed off as a joke, and Dr. Blentwood resumed: "The idea I was after is simply that one may grow better without effort, because the currents of his being run towards the good, while another may be carried towards the bad, though he struggle hard, because inherited tendencies are too strong for him. Now the question is, which person in the sight of God has the most merit? And this question is intensified if

the person of good tendencies does not go to the relief of the other. Jesus denounced the Pharisee, not for lack of outward good conduct, but because of his spiritual pride and want of sympathetic helpfulness towards those below him."

"Well, I see nothing to admire in a man who is growing worse, anyway."

"That, Mrs. Lighthouse, may be because you and I cannot look into the heart. If we could we might see something heroic and even beautiful, though he is defeated at every stand he makes, as we see something to admire in the soldiers who fought so bravely at Bunker Hill, though they were defeated."

"But that defeat was a virtual victory, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and so every struggle in the human heart is a partial victory, though an apparent defeat. All goodness is the result of struggle in ourselves or our ancestors; and I believe God cannot afford and will not allow a single struggle towards the good to be lost on the character of him who makes it."

Dr. Lighthouse clapped his hands and said, "That is why publicans and harlots may go into the kingdom of heaven before Pharisees. If my wife would make one struggle to allow me a little peace in my home I should have more hopes of her. I think I ought to go to heaven for relieving her folks of the plague of their lives, and yet I don't want to go if she goes there; I have seen enough of her here!"

"You ought to be thankful," replied his wife, that you have somebody to train you and make you decent; but I don't hang my hopes of salvation on my good works."

"If you did," said her husband, with a comical face and gesture, "your poor hopes would have to fall for want of a hook, like a man's clothes in a woman's closet."

After a little more good-natured sparring, in which Mrs. Lightheart took refuge in God's sovereignty, Dr. Blentwood said, "It is evidently not God's plan to drive people into the kingdom of His love and service; He calls for volunteers. We know nothing of goodness by force. By close espionage and prison walls we may make a man outwardly and negatively blameless, but unless there is created within him an aspiration and longing after the good, he becomes the same man when restraint is removed, as before."

"Our work, then, is to lead him by precept and example into good influences and to awaken conscience, is it not, father?" asked Miss Blentwood.

"Precisely," was the reply. "Man's freedom allows him to put himself under either of two sets of laws, and here lies the opportunity of the Christian."

"Ethel," asked Dr. Lightheart, "where will a true Christian woman commence her service, especially by example?"

With a significant smile she replied, "The Christian spirit of forbearance, gentleness and love in

man or woman will necessarily appear first and always at home, I think."

"Like the mission of the apostles," I added, "it will necessarily commence at Jerusalem, or at home, but not end there."

Mrs. Lightheart evidently did not like this kind of Christian evidence; for she went back to the subject from which we diverged and said, "If God meant to save the degraded classes He would have made them worth saving, and not made it so repulsive for us to do anything for them."

"Better let some folks, who call themselves saved," said her husband, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "ask whether there is sweetness enough in them to keep. Just think of a sour, crabbed, little soul living forever, and in heaven! If she attempted to sing, all the angels would stop their harps and ask, What is that?—Is it a crow?"

"Better be a crow in heaven than a turtle in brimstone," retorted his wife.

"Oh, what a talking couple!" exclaimed Dr. Blentwood, laughing in spite of himself. He added, "Whether one is worth saving is not for us to judge. According to Darwin we were all very unpromising specimens of humanity once, lower than the degraded classes you referred to are now."

"The development theory is contrary to the Bible, doctor."

"No, not contrary; it is simply a question of method—whether God was one minute or thousands of years in creating man. The latter, even more than the other method, harmonizes with

God's known plans, and better shows His purpose to have been eternal rather than a sudden impulse."

"Then you believe in a theory which has been called one of infidelity, Dr. Blentwood?"

"I neither believe nor disbelieve it. The scientific facts seem to lean that way, and I am in a teachable attitude, as all lovers of truth should be. There are too many indocile, intractable Christians who find it easier to cry heresy than to search honestly for the truth, and so reveal only their own weakness of faith."

"Oh, these riders on the coat-tails of progress!" broke out Dr. Lightheart. "They once affirmed it to be rank infidelity to believe the world moved instead of the sun in producing day and night, and the phenomena of a rising and setting sun!"

"Independent of the Darwinian theory," I here asserted, "we need not go very far back in history to find our Saxon ancestors clothed in bear-skins, and living in huts; and if God had not watched over and tenderly taught them, and lifted them and succeeding generations higher and higher, where would we, their proud Anglo-American descendants, be to-day?"

"I would like to hear some good possible reasons why God started the human race so low down," said Miss Blentwood.

"Aside from His apparent love of progress and the evidence it gives of His eternal working purpose," her father answered, "it may be for man's everlasting happiness to be able to trace

his ascension from the lowest depths to the highest attainable good—from the hell of ignorance and selfish passion to the heaven of intelligence and righteous peace. This conscious progress may also be essential to man's permanency and freedom in goodness, when goodness is acquired. This experience was wanting in the first man, and that explains his fall, as it does why so many children, grown up in ignorance of sin and how to meet it, yield to the very first temptation presenting itself. Like a weed grown up in the shade, they have no resisting power. They are simply moral infants."

"Like back-yard toadstools and slaves of majorities in politics and theology, you step on them and they acquiesce!" said Dr. Lightheart laughing. He added, "But, Dr. Blentwood, granting Darwinianism to be substantially true, is not Beecher's remark, that the race fell up instead of down, correct?"

"We must not get our notion of Adam or the first man from Milton, as many do. He was simply innocent, like a child, with no positive holiness, and when he took possession of himself, so to speak, to think for himself and guide himself, he lost even his negative innocence, and so had to go down before he could rise again, as a man climbing a mountain has sometimes to go down into a depression before he can go up. As the mountain-climber goes higher by means of his descent, so man rises from his fall, through the inborn spirit of Christ, infinitely higher than

before; he rises into positive and permanent freedom in goodness."

"Is that the only sense in which he fell up?"

"I think, Dr. Lightheart, no one can rise into the highest manhood or womanhood, who has not the spirit or disposition of Christ. I care not for mere technicalities or sect, or however loud the profession or non-profession; no one who has not the love exhibited by Jesus of Nazareth, and creates no social warmth and no sunshine in the home and society, can rightfully be called a Christian or a real true man or woman. The man who has this serving, helpful, glorious love-lit disposition, whatever his creed or want of creed, is the highest style of man."

"Amen," said I, in approval. "How much better it would be for the good name of Christianity and the progress of the world in all that goes to make heaven here and hereafter, if manifesting the spirit of Christ should become the chief creed subscribed to by the churches!"

"If I was a young man," said Dr. Blentwood, with tears in his voice, "I would start a church with a creed something like that. I should feel that I was working for Christ indeed, and for the glory of God, because for the glory of man; but my work is about done, and my opportunity is passed."

Tears stood in the good man's eyes, and I silently prayed that health might be given him and his life be prolonged; and, as I looked into

Ethel's sympathetic face, tears sprang into my own eyes also.

"Well," spoke up Mrs. Lightheart, in a voice as dry as summer dust and about as comforting as the hottest sirocco that ever blew, "I believe the church is composed of the elect, and a pastor's duty is to encourage the church and not the non-elect by any twaddle about disposition. Don't you believe in election, Professor Bloomfield?"

I answered, that I believed the elect are whosoever will, and the non-elect are whosoever will not.

"It isn't a question of will or will not, but one of election of the Lord," she replied hotly. "And, furthermore, I think the more silly notions you put into the heads of the non-elect, especially of the degraded classes, the more they will suffer in this world and the next. All they are fit for is to serve the elect and as a warning."

"You see the use she has for me; and may imagine the solid comfort she takes in that belief!" said her husband, with a mixture of irony and an expression I could not understand.

"Have you," asked Dr. Blentwood, with pitying pathos, "ever looked teachably with Peter into the sheet of creeping things let down to him from heaven, and which convinced him that he should labor for the lowest as well as the highest?"

Before she could answer, Miss Blentwood exclaimed, "Excuse me, but do see that beautiful cloud! How peculiarly white and fleecy it is!"

All looked, and all admired. "Was anything ever finer?" asked Mrs. Lightheart, with as near approach to ecstasy as she was probably capable.

"That cloud," I asserted, "has risen for Mrs. Lightheart's benefit."

"How so?" she asked.

"Well, as the first step to an answer, let me ask Dr. Lightheart, as a scientific man, where that cloud came from?"

"Very likely," he replied, "from the filthy pools and miasmatic swamps, in the vicinity of which I have dealt out so much quinine."

"Now, Mrs. Lightheart," I said, "the same power that raised that cloud from filth to purity, can raise, and does raise, the ignorant, sinful soul, and make it clean and beautiful, fit for the society of angels."

"I don't dispute God's power," responded Mrs. Lightheart, "but I don't think He requires refined people to soil their pure feelings by laboring among such characters; it is so shocking to one of elegant taste and delicate sensibilities, you know. I think the coarse should labor for the coarse."

"I agree with so much of homœopathy as is contained in the last sentence," said her husband laughing. "I am always glad when I can agree with my wife. As a rule the morally degraded can be more successfully reached by those of like ways of thinking."

"Very likely," said Dr. Blentwood, "but does that relieve the refined classes of responsibility?"

"Certainly not. They can set the wheels of benevolence in motion, superintend their operation, and work where they can fit in."

"Do your remarks find any confirmation in the fact that the heathen prefer native preachers, and that negroes of the South prefer teachers of their own race?" asked Miss Blentwood.

"The question of refinement does not come in there so much as race prejudice," said her father; "but there may be force in the argument of adaptability of kind to kind, and the feeling expressed in the phrase, He is one of us."

"But," I asked, "cannot men and women of true refinement do successful work among the lower classes?"

"Oh! that would shock their nerves," answered Dr. Lightheart laughing.

"Jesus of Nazareth," I went on, "was our highest ideal of a perfect man, and therefore must have had the finest, keenest sensibilities—no soul ever recoiling with such tremendous repulsion from contact with sin as did His—and yet He drew the degraded classes to Him, and won their confidence—their joyful, unstinted, exuberant love. Does not this prove that a man of real, true culture, and not a dilettante—a man of roundabout, sanctified common-sense—can bring himself down into sympathetic and effectual work for any class of society?"

"It would seem so," Dr. Lightheart answered, with a squint towards his wife; "but the trouble with over-refined people is that they haven't

sanctified common sense, or much of any other kind of sense. Their culture, instead of improving and properly embellishing the quality, has only worn away the substance, and left them more useless than before."

Whether his wife took this remark as having any reference to herself, I could not tell, for, at this juncture, a messenger came announcing company and a patient for the Lighthearts. Our repast was over. Mrs. Lightheart, rising, addressed Miss Blentwood petulantly, but with a voice thinly sugar-coated by an affected smile and grace of attitude and gesture, "My company always come inopportunistly; I hope you are more fortunate."

"My friends never come inopportunistly for *me*," Miss Blentwood responded, smiling, "but perhaps they often do for themselves, as I cannot always serve them as I would like. I think, however, that sensible people, whose opinions we value, can make allowances for circumstances over which we have no control."

"Well," continued Mrs. Lightheart, with vexation clearly marked beneath the smirk of her thin lips, "my company never come when I want them. As sure as I set out for a good time by myself or with others, company or something else is sure to come and spoil all my plans."

Here, I thought, is a great gulf between these two women, as "fixed" as that between Lazarus and the rich man; for no thought or feeling in common can pass over from one to the other.

Ethel's remark had contained an implied, but unconscious rebuke—unconscious, because her limpid eyes told of a heart too tender to offend. Her evident frankness, purity of motive, gentle, unselfish spirit and sweet thoughtfulness for others opened to me more and more as I gazed admiringly upon her. I was so entranced I almost forgot my manners, and scarcely rose in time to wave my hand in farewell as the Light-hearts departed, and Dr. Blentwood with them, the latter communicating something confidential to his physician.

CHAPTER X.

A PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE.

ETHEL BLENTWOOD and I were alone, standing on nearly opposite sides of the table, she watching the retiring guests and I watching her. Whether there is such a thing as silent communication of mind with mind or not the blood mounted to her cheeks, and, though she was looking away from me, I felt conscious of the touch of a kindred spirit. The thrill was so marked, I thought of one, who, in merely touching the hem of Jesus' garment, touched Him also. In a transport of ecstasy, I thought, half audibly I fear, "Beautiful! beautiful!"

She turned towards me with an inquiring but softening look in her long-lashed blue eyes full of magnetic scintillations. With some confusion I asked, "Do you believe in visions, Miss Blentwood?"

"In a limited sense," she answered, smiling.

"To be more definite," I continued, modifying my intended statement a little, "I think there are times which come to us all, when there opens to us the best thing possible for us to be and to pursue; and if we accept nothing lower, but can

say in after years, like Paul, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,' glorious will it be for us."

"I believe that," she said earnestly, "but the trouble is worldly ambition leads so very many to accept something lower than the best possible."

"Precisely," I assented, "and since there are so many, you will not consider me uncharitable, when I say we have had a case in point this afternoon. Mrs. Lightheart likes to go to church in rich attire, with nice, genteel people, and, though she hears the Christ preached, is very careful to be as unlike Him as possible."

"She is called a very elegant and stylish lady," said Ethel, with a troubled look in her eyes.

"Undoubtedly," I responded, "and therein lies her ambition, which not only perverts and dwarfs her own higher impulses, but the impulses of those who have placed in her their confidence and love. When a beautiful face and an elegant form inspire in others only a love for elegance and fashion, then, indeed, are those gifts pernicious. On the other hand, what a force for good a woman can exert whose mind is as beautiful as her face and figure, and can inspire in man a passion which shall flow in the same general direction with the noblest aims and possibilities! Such a woman can make a great life-task easier, carrying, as she does, a benediction in her very presence."

"Is not the converse of this also true?" asked

Ethel. "Are not the nobler aspirations of woman kindled or depressed in the same way?"

"True," I admitted, "but where is the beautiful woman who chooses a mission for herself to be helped or depressed? She is apt to rest satisfied with her beauty and to have no higher ambition than to be mistress of a fine home, live in luxury, with everything at her command, and enjoy a sort of lavender-water existence! Nothing but the smallpox, leaving the pits deep in her face, can save her from utter worthlessness."

"You do not believe much in beautiful women," she said, with a faint smile.

"There are noble exceptions," I responded; "in them I believe. But as a general rule, it is the plainer girl that stores her mind with useful thoughts, and is willing and ready to make sacrifices for the sake of truth and righteousness. She is the one capable of seeing something higher than personal adornment—of choosing or accepting the harder tasks of life for the good she can do."

"Do you not think it a duty, Professor Bloomfield, to make one's self as attractive as possible, consistent with other duties?"

"Certainly, Miss Blentwood."

"Do you not also think it proper to get as much enjoyment out of life as possible, consistent with the faithful discharge of duty to God and mankind?"

"Most assuredly; I am no stoic. I quarrel with no delight which is not base. I love the

innocent pleasures and comforts of life, and resist their blandishments only when they would step between me and duty to myself and others. But it is not well to live altogether in one class of society however enjoyable. We must have the low tones as well as the high. Life's tenor, some one has said, has its bass, and its soprano has its alto, in a full-choired humanity. Mine shall not be a chained and bent and visionless life, but it must be one of comparative poverty."

"How so?" she asked, with agitation.

"Well, to begin with, my taste would be satisfied only with elegant surroundings, and all the privileges of art and travel; and, indeed, I am so full of hungry passions, it would take so many things to satisfy me that I dare not seek them. I should want to win, and in elbowing my way among other seekers, there might be great temptation to wink at the wrongly-held notions of commercial honesty, and pocket the proceeds, thereby losing that fine conscientiousness which is essential to true manhood and real life."

"Do you think the temptations you refer to are found in the ministry? Why would not a pastorate be the very place, and most congenial too, where a person of your talent, culture and taste could be the most useful?"

"I have great respect for the true pastor; but even in the ministry there is too much sanctified selfishness, too much unholy ambition for place and power, too much temptation to nurse denominational pride, and the pride of oratorical dis-

play to meet the demand for mere entertainment from the pulpit, rather than self-forgetfulness in seeking the good of others. In short, there is a temptation to wire-pulling and to put one's unworldly aspirations in pawn for the sake of a rich pastorate, big salary and all the refined comforts of a worldly life. I prefer to work where I know I am actuated only by the purest motives."

She was looking sweetly thoughtful, and, as I paused, said with a gratified smile, "You are much like my father.

"He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for his power to thunder. His heart's his mouth."

You implied there were other reasons, for self-renunciation, I think."

"Yes, we are debtors to the ignorant and debased as well as to the wise and the good; for we all belong to one common humanity. Those below me have the right to ask me to let down my hand and lift them up to where I stand, as I have the right to ask those above me to help me to their better footing. Now the church is not doing this work as it might and ought. Christianity encamps in costly church edifices, and says to the poor, Come and be converted; whereas Jesus, its author, went about doing good, carrying Christianity to the very homes and hearts of the needy. He mingled with the neglected classes, ate with them, talked with them, slept in their humble abodes, and, by precept and example, taught them the way of life. The poorly clothed

say they cannot feel at home in fine churches and among the well-dressed. They need a living gospel brought to them by warm hearts full of the blood and nerve of human sympathy to help them out of their low environment and wretched state of body and mind. Not feeling the need of a physician, they will not call one, or come to your office to be healed. Somebody must go and convince them. Who will go? Why not I? I fear necessity is laid upon me."

I suppose I spoke with some enthusiasm, for she said, with glowing cheeks, "You seem inspired. I feel the force of your words. Somebody should go, certainly, but at first thought it seems rather hard that one of fine abilities and culture, to whom beautiful surroundings constitute a native element, should forego these to come in contact with harsh people and harsher surroundings, that act upon one like a rasp lacerating the tender flesh and often wounding still deeper the tender spirit."

"Do you think one need be necessarily unhappy in such a work?" I asked.

"No," she said thoughtfully, "but the work will require great patience, a noble self-poise and constant rill-like out-flowings of goodness; and where the soul of the worker is large, fed by deep springs of love, fired by passionate devotion, and sustained by an abiding, unwavering faith in the beneficent purposes of God, I can see not only satisfaction but even happiness—not the noisy, light-hearted happiness of an easier life, perhaps,

ity of purpose and correctness of judgment, all glorified by a true Christian culture and the discipline of domestic love ! With her as my other self, my needed better half, my life would become completely rounded. I longed to express my inmost feelings. But no, I thought, she does not know me as I know her ; for her whole nature is so guileless, so generous, so true, that there is nothing covered to be unpleasantly revealed by any future experience, whereas I may not be so clearly read. Besides, what have I to offer her except a loving heart, a fair amount of brains and a life of service to others ? No, no, that will never do. Oh ! if I could devote my talents to surround her with the beauties and comforts of life ; but I cannot live for wealth. I must do my life-work, and it would be mean to seek to link her life with mine for the sake of my own happiness. But, I argued with myself, she would make my life a fuller and more useful one. Yes, but at an awful sacrifice to her. Would she feel it a sacrifice ? Perhaps not, for she will live nobly whoever she marries ; but there are so many paths it would not be right to divert her steps into the hardest one, when she might be even more useful in the easiest.

She looked up, and I had to cut short these reflections, which had run much more rapidly through my mind than I have portrayed them. It seemed to me that a heaven of purity and peace was looking out of the calm depths of those liquid eyes. I said, rather tremulously, " Miss

Blentwood, if I believed in the transmigration of souls, I should think I had been acquainted with you in some other sphere a thousand years!"

"It does seem impossible," she said smiling, "that we have known each other so short a time. Can you tell why it is that we become acquainted with some persons more thoroughly in a few hours than with others in as many years, the latter perhaps never being known to us?"

"Some souls," I replied, "are printed in minion type, and others in capitals, some on blurred paper and others on clean."

"Yes," she assented, "but there are some excellent people with whom it is hard to get acquainted."

"Very true," I said, "but the closed human volumes, that open only a page at a time, may be very judicious and very correct and proper; but I like an open book, as I do an open Bible, which seems to say, Read the whole story at once or a portion anywhere you wish."

"I like that kind too," she said, with a pleased look, "but may not some keep the volume closed from self-depreciation, thinking they have nothing a stranger would be interested in?"

"Perhaps," I admitted; "but more because they dare not reveal themselves. The experience which has turned the leaves of their souls has been wholly selfish. And that reminds me of the many whose pages are so blotted by sin that they themselves do not know what is in the volume of their own souls."

"How can they," she asked in Scripture phrase, "unless they be taught?"

"And how can they be taught," I added, "without a teacher?"

"And how can one teach," she smiling asked again, "unless sent?"

This gave me a good chance to say, "You are qualified for the work; how do you know that you are not sent?"

She looked a little surprised, and then replied, "You have too high an opinion of me; but, admitting for the moment, that I have the requisite qualifications, is that an evidence that I am called?"

"So far as it goes," I answered.

"And how far is that?"

"It holds good, I think, Miss Blentwood, till you discover that you have other qualifications better fitting you for another sphere of usefulness. Have you never felt drawn towards some such work?"

She merely quoted, in answer, Dr. Holland:

"I count this thing to be grandly true,
That a noble deed is a step towards God."

"I felt sure, Miss Blentwood, you had a clear perception of what it is to live sublimely; but, if you will allow me the question, can you imagine yourself deliberately choosing a hard lot, in preference to an easy one, for the sake of so living?"

"I can imagine it," she answered gravely. "A life of elegant ease in the absence of high demand

would seem both monotonous and wasteful to me. It would cheapen life and take away its elixir, its deeper relish. I should feel that an atmosphere of moral mediocrity was settling down over all my prospects, nullifying my better ambition, stifling my highest aspirations, and preventing me from fulfilling the obligations of my existence. But, while I should not like a silken bondage, which arrests all motive, I have no love for a hard lot and contact with sordid vulgarity in themselves considered; and the only relief to such a dark picture, would be the keeping my eye fixed on the moral beauty to spring up beneath this harsh contact, under the sanction of the Master, whose example I followed, and the consciousness that, however slow it might show itself in spiritual refinement, the heaven would go on under God's eye blessing individuals and their homes."

Her words drew me by a power I could not clearly define, something beyond the resources of expression. I only knew she was perfectly lovely to me, with a glorified human light shining forth from every feature. When a woman first gives embodiment and life to our day-dreams and shadowy conceptions of all that is truest and best, she fills a void in our spiritual nature, till then, perhaps, unknown, because we realize the fulfilment in her of our prophetic longings.

She raised her truthful, innocent, blue eyes to mine; I felt their magnetism, and dared not speak for a moment, lest I should forget the proprieties belonging to a short acquaintance, and was glad

to avail myself of the sight of Pomp to refer to him. Ethel laughed so brightly, that it seemed a part of the very sunlight which at that moment shimmered and rippled through the leaves of the trees upon her fair face.

"You ought to have seen him," she said, "after he had tumbled downstairs on his return from your room, where he had been sent to see if you were awake. He rushed into the farthest corner of the kitchen and crouched there with his hands held tightly over his face, trembling and speechless. After being questioned repeatedly he looked through his fingers, and finally withdrew his hands from his eyes, which stared wildly about, and asked his mother, 'Is I here in de same ole kitchen?'"

" 'Ob cose you is,' replied Tot, 'what de matter wid ye?'"

" 'Dey killin' dat man up dar.'"

" 'Who killin' him, you pickaninny?'"

" 'De debbels, marm. Dey were shakin' and burnin' him inside; for he eyes were all ablaze, an' fire an' smoke an' brimster were pourin' out he mouf. When de debbels spied me froo de crack ob de do', dey yell an' grab for me, and knock me down sta'r, an' shake me an' poun' me all de way to de bottom.'"

" 'More like de fall shake ye an' de sta'r pound ye, ye wild-cat chile!'"

"Pomp looked at his hands and felt of his face to satisfy himself that he was all there, and then looked up with such a relieved and droll expres-

sion that our laughter became uncontrollable, in which we were joined by father and Dr. Light-heart, who had just entered the room."

Tom and Tot now came to rearrange the table for another meal, to which they had been permitted to invite their special colored friends, including their children. We passed to a seat under the row of maples next the river, where was an unobstructed view of that broad sheet of water and an extensive landscape of varied surface and color.

As we seated ourselves we were a little startled by a noise which sounded like the mingled cry of all the animal creation. I rose to my feet. I could see nothing explaining the sounds. They came again, and on the side-hill just emerging from the woods I beheld a dozen black children, all capering on their hands and feet, each with a different style of action and cry in imitation of some particular animal. Pomp, as might be expected, was the leader, and excelled all the others in his grotesque feats. He would spring forward, then sideways, then upwards, as if thrown by his hands as well as feet, and, before coming down, would spring again as from an invisible foothold, precisely as I had seen deer on a western prairie. He would no sooner strike the ground than he would go up again like a rubber ball. This remarkable feat he continued till apparently exhausted, when he would creep slowly and stealthily, and then, rounding up his back, strike out with his hands, snarling and crying like a cat,

and then he would run and twitter and sit up in exact imitation of a squirrel while peeling a beech-nut or eating an apple. He was metamorphosed into various other creatures, the last and most ludicrous being the ape. Here he was more at home than ever, playing tricks with the others, and acting so preposterously absurd that laugh we had to in spite of ourselves, even after resuming our seats.

"It would seem," I remarked, "that Darwin's chimpanzee has reasserted itself in that boy Pomp."

"What an attraction he would be for 'Barnum's greatest show on earth'!" she responded.

"Out de way, ye brack bars, ye wild-cats, ye draggle-tailed monkeys! What if de Lord transmogrify ye into dem ar' animals yer imitatin'? What would be de consequentiality den?"

It was the voice of Tom, and I looked round in season to see the children, who had surrounded him, scampering away on all fours towards Tot, who was puffing under a load of fried cakes fresh from the house-kitchen, her round, fat face, looking more like the full moon than ever, for there was Indian blood in her veins, which asserted itself when overheated. Placing her burden safely on the table, she broke out:

"Doan' you know dat missus and Perfessor Boomfield are jes' on tudder side dat sugar-maple? Now go way wid ye, ebervy brat of ye, and 'have you'selves, ef ye want any dinner." With this admonition and a mouthful of cake for

each, they scurried away like so many rabbits, and Ethel and I resumed our conversation.

She quoted Paul, "Not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual."

As much for the sake of listening to the melody of her voice and enjoying the charm of her varying expression as to draw out her views, I asked, "How much do you mean by that Scripture quotation?"

"Simply that no one is born spiritually, but only naturally."

"Do you mean there is no spiritual capacity or germ, or depraved spiritual nature or——"

"I mean no more than this—that the animal alone manifests itself, and wholly predominates at first, and the lower you descend the human scale the more you find of the animal."

"What advantage has the most favorably-born child over Pomp, for instance?"

"Many generations the better start."

"But Pomp has more of the animal than his parents."

"And he dates back. As you yourself intimated, the ape has reasserted itself in him. We are talking of appearances, I suppose, and not necessarily of facts."

"You will admit, will you not, Miss Blentwood, that even Pomp, buried as he is in the animal, may be converted?"

"Certainly, but from conversation with missionaries and others of large experience, I infer

that in such cases the spiritual life rarely gets entire control, though giving evidence of its presence in the soul and struggling for the mastery."

"Are animalism and selfishness synonymous with sin?"

"That is too deep a question for me. I only know that selfishness in us is sin, and that the animal life is essentially selfish. Is it not so, Professor Bloomfield?"

"Most assuredly. No one who has ever fed animals but must have found that out."

"Your admission leads me to strike a horrid blow at the poetic sentiment, which calls a babe an angel!" she said, blushing behind her smiles.

"So long as you don't hit the babe I'll risk the sentiment," said I. "Proceed, please."

"It seems harsh, but isn't it true that children at first are only little animals?"

"'Only,' do you mean?"

"Hyperbolically speaking, and they want their way just like other little animals."

"The poor dears," with mock seriousness.

"What sweet, winning ways they have!"

"Yes, and so have all young animals."

"But the animal does not ascend, whereas the babe becomes angelic, it may be."

"Yes, *becomes*, but is not now."

"Well, but how good little children are—sometimes!"

"And so are cats when you stroke the fur the right way, and they are in the mood; but look

out for scratches! the claws are there, depend upon it."

We had been talking only half seriously, interlarding our conversation with much laughter; but I now asked somewhat earnestly, "Why is it that children come to your house, and you are so fond of them, and do so much for them, if they are not angelic?"

"I love them in spite of their wants, as I believe the Creator loves me in spite of mine."

"But, Miss Blentwood, you cannot love a nonentity. You must see something to love. What is it?"

"Well, one thing, children have cunning, innocent ways, and are attractive on that account, as pet animals are; and that is about as far as the love of many silly people goes who blanket their dogs and take them out for an airing to the neglect of poor children by the wayside, who would be immensely benefited by taking the dog's place."

I clapped my hands in approval. She continued: "I love them for the same reason these people do, but for something, I hope higher and nobler. I see within each child, however rough externally, a possible angel, somewhat, perhaps, as the sculptor sees one in his block of marble; and as he with inspiration chips away that which surrounds his ideal that it may, unimprisoned, stand out to view, so I am seized with enthusiasm, whenever I see a child, to do what I can to make the possible angel a reality, before the angelic

capability is imprisoned by habits of stone so hard that they cannot be cut away except by the heavy blows of a stern experience—stern, though directed by the love of the divine Architect Himself.”

How my heart sang, as I sat with my back against the tree watching her, and wishing that the sweet now-and-now would last, and wondering if there would or could be any higher bliss for me with her in the sweet by-and-by!

There was silence for a few moments which I did not care to break, content, as I was, with the joy of seeing and being. I wondered whether she could feel the touch of my sympathy, my love, my happiness, as I felt the touch of her holy innocence and supreme loveliness—whether the communion of our spirits was as real and certain to her as to me. But I felt sure that, while my mind to commune with hers must ascend, hers to meet mine must descend; and therefore my happiness was the more exalted. It looked up—had in it the element of worship. I had watched and worked and prayed that I might possess the Master's disposition; but hers was a beauty of soul, to the dizzy height of which I had never climbed. I could climb, I thought, with the uplift which her constant society would give me.

I had often hoped, if the time ever came for me to marry, I might find some such girl as Ethel, and not, like so many educated men, fall in love with one of empty head, drawn by her apparent large-heartedness and femininity, and discover when too

late that her supposed affectionate disposition was as shallow as her brains. But the time had not come, I reasoned with myself, for me to fall in love, and, furthermore, this girl was too good for me—too good for anybody, except to be her father's daughter. He must be exceedingly vain and self-opinionated who thinks he can make her happier by asking her to become his wife.

She lifted her soft blue eyes so kindly and so full upon me, mirroring in their calm, clear depths a soul so pure and peaceful, and withal so full of beauty and noble purpose that, for an instant, I felt that I was looking into the spirit land. Forgetting for the moment where our conversation left off, I said, "Miss Blentwood, I wish you had as good company as I have."

She laughingly rejoined, "Oh, that will do for a joke, Professor Bloomfield! but the truth is I am the more fortunate; for there is much of society I can enjoy as a recreation only, beyond which it is a waste of time, and it is a treat to have some one, in addition to father and Dr. Lightheart, to converse with to my mental profit as well as pleasure. Don't misunderstand me; I like fun and can talk nonsense, but am not satisfied with it as a steady diet! I like a helpful guide, who can and will look with me beneath the surface and into the philosophy of things a little. It makes life seem more worth living." As she said this a slight tinge of color suffused her cheeks.

"I think I understand you, Miss Blentwood, and it is largely because I understand you that I

have enjoyed your society beyond all measure. It stands out unique among all my experiences as the greatest feast of my life. You possess that rare combination which satisfies me intellectually and socially, and satisfies me as no other lady I ever met."

I suddenly became aware that I was putting the case strongly, and revealing my heart inopportunely, and in explanation added, "You are aware that I leave to-morrow morning, and Providence only knows when we shall meet again, or whether at all, and you will please consider these words spoken—when I may not have an opportunity of speaking them—at parting. It is in simple justice to you and the truth in my own heart that I have said what I have."

She looked up with more color, yet pleased and trustful, showing that deception played no part in her composition. The transparent purity and frankness of her character struck me with new force, and won me with tremendous and unwonted energy. I felt myself drawing dangerously near to that ancient precipice of avowal, which stands high above and beyond the highest peak in the whole mountain range of admiration, down which I might any moment plunge. Almost overpowered by the forces drawing me on, I struggled against them, at last conquered, and was ready to listen.

"I have implicit confidence in your conscientiousness, Professor Bloomfield, and, therefore, though you are too generous in your opinion of

my abilities, I am comforted by the thought that I am not altogether stupid to a person of large intelligence and Christian culture like yourself. I am sorry you must leave, and not be near us where we could all meet occasionally and discuss the great questions of life so interesting to me. I think I could grow under your tuition. You awaken thought, and stir that which is best and deepest in me."

"I am very grateful," I answered, "if I have been able to compensate in the slightest degree for the pleasure I have enjoyed in your society. Mutual helpfulness is one of the divinest of joys, but whatever my society has been to you, I am and shall ever remain greatly your debtor."

"Well," she said playfully, "if the indebtedness is mutual, that ought to square the books. To return to the question we were discussing, I inferred you had something more to say on the possible angel in every child."

"Yes, I would like to ask what in your opinion is that possible angel? Is it only a capacity, a capability? Or does it exist in embryo, in the seed form, germinally? Or is it a fallen angel, with powers all there, only perverted, overborne, clubbed down? or, stronger still, so corrupted by inheritance as not only to be inclined toward sin, but to be sin in its very essence?"

"Oh, Professor Bloomfield! these are deep, hard questions. I only know which view satisfies my mind; but if not Scriptural I must of course give it up; for where the Bible speaks clearly, it is the

clue by which to thread our way through the labyrinthine uncertainties of this life."

"Very true, Miss Blentwood; we agree in our loyalty to the Book; but I am interested to know which theory satisfies you intellectually."

"I would like to think man is created with all his faculties in germ, spiritually as well as morally, intellectually, æsthetically, socially, physically—in other words, that every power, from foundation to superstructure comes with us in our birth into this world. This view seems to harmonize with the plan of creation as one of development and progress; but is it Scriptural?"

"That depends. Present orthodoxy requires a belief in corruption or a tendency to sin from some source. Believers in the development theory locate that tendency back of Adam in the brute creation whence we sprung; and the brute instincts men exhibit would seem to favor that theory. The Biblical account of Adam's disobedience does not, I think, necessarily militate against this view, and some would say that it explained it. If Adam developed from the animal kingdom, inheriting instincts centering only in self, it is easy to see how he might go astray, however innocent he might be. But until science speaks clearly, we are not called upon to adopt its guesses, though shrewd and may prove to be true. One thing is certain, that all have this tendency to sin, however it got into our composition and wherever it may be located; but your theory harmonizes with all the known facts of science,

and I see no reason why it may not be made to harmonize with the Bible. But all this may be profitable only as a sort of intellectual gymnastics; the great fact remains, which no theory can dissipate, that the spiritual faculty of the child may be born into life and power by the quickening influence of Divine love. You have something to appeal to in every child—something higher than matter, higher than intellect. All the possibilities of the best man or woman lie enfolded in the little child. Christ is in it, waiting to be born."

"That takes me out of the woods into light," exclaimed Miss Blentwood with animation. "The different theories threw me into the jungles."

"Doubtless I have passed through the same difficulty," I said.

"Please state it, Professor Bloomfield; it will make my way still clearer."

"Well, Miss Blentwood, in your search for a scientific method of procedure with the little child, you have said, All its body wants is food and training, and the same is true of the intellectual, social, affectional, æsthetical and moral natures; but is the spiritual germinal and to be fed and trained in the same way? If so, where comes in the new birth? If the new birth is the creation of a new faculty, then my possible angel is not a whole being to start with, and I have nothing here to feed—no real foundation on which to build. However I may develop all the other faculties and powers, for that which crowns, over-

tops, and beautifies all the rest, and makes the child at all angelic, I must fold my arms and await the creative fiat. But when you said that no new faculty is added by conversion, it was clear to you that whether this spiritual faculty is simply germinal or essentially wicked, it is there, and you had something to appeal to. If feeble, or, in Scripture phrase, dead, it is so because starved, and needs food. On what shall it feed? On God. It must have the life-giving or the life-restoring impact of God through inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

"To sum up, you reasoned that every human faculty and power is a feeding creature, each on its kind. The body must have material food, the intellect intellectual food or truth, the moral nature moral truth, and the spiritual nature spiritual truth, or Divine truth—the Truth, as Jesus declared Himself to be. Here, then, is as plain a work for me to do for the spiritual as for the intellectual nature. I am to feed it with the bread of life. Here is a ground for spiritual instruction in Sunday-Schools and elsewhere."

Miss Blentwood brought her pretty hands together in a most expressive manner and with charming emphasis said, "Professor Bloomfield, I thank you very, very much; for you have stated my case a thousand-fold better than I could, and let in a flood of light where before it was dark, and I can see so far!"

I was surprised at her enthusiasm, but—Oh! how beautiful she looked, with her heightened color and joyful animation! Her right hand was

resting carelessly on the seat near mine, and, before I realized what I was doing, my toying fingers went slowly towards hers till they touched. I drew back my hand quickly, but not till that touch had gone through me like an electric shock, minus the pain. I managed to regain my normal condition and to say, "You looked so ethereal I began to doubt almost whether you belonged to this mundane sphere, till I touched your hand."

"You are hitting my enthusiasm," she said, with a look and gesture of playful warning.

"Not in the least," I replied. "On the contrary, it is a joy to find one who can take so much pleasure in ideas as you seem to. There cannot be too much enthusiasm in that direction. Indeed, I feel a strong sympathy for that Greek philosopher who, discovering a new idea, forgot all about the fashions, as he ran through the streets crying, Eureka! If Columbus was laudably enthusiastic in the discovery of America, why should not we be as enthusiastic in exploring for new worlds of thought, which have so close a relation to human happiness and well-being?"

"I am thankful," she said, "there are Columboes in the mental world, who go on voyages of discovery, and bring back trophies of rare interest and value, and hints of still greater things. I only wish there were more explorers spiritual as well as intellectual."

"There would be more, Miss Blentwood, if more people knew the happiness of living in the upper

rooms of their many-storied nature. The trouble is, so many get no higher than the basement for a better view, a purer air, and a more glorious sunshine. Having experienced nothing higher, they are content with material things. It only proves that their lower nature predominates over their higher."

"This brings us back to our former discussion, Professor Bloomfield. It is evident that the first step in the higher education of such persons is to be taken on the basement floor, where they are living. It is of no use to teach them from the attic; we must go down where they are, enter into sympathy with their thoughts and views, and lead them step by step to the upper stories."

"You have the true theory of education, Miss Blentwood, scholastic and Christian. You cannot teach seven leagues off. Jesus did not do it. He took people as he found them and where he found them. He taught them with evident sympathy by illustrations familiar to them, the spiritual meaning of which dawned upon their dull minds at last."

CHAPTER XI.

A NEGRO WEDDING.

AT this moment Miss Blentwood excused herself, and went to the assistance of Tot, who was seating the children at the table in evident perplexity. With a merry and cheerful countenance she soon lifted all signs of burden from Tot's full round face, causing her to say, "You knows how to do ebery ting, Miss Ethel; no need hab no trouble where you is. Your hubban wont break his back staggerin' under de burdens ob life; for when he comes home and looks at you cheery face and gentle ways, 'fore he know it, de burdens will roll clean off'n him, done gone forebber."

She did look lovely enough to scatter the darkest clouds that ever gathered on a human face. Pink roses bestarred her fair cheeks, and her lustrous blue-eyes spoke so winningly of inward joy and harmony, it was like listening to glad music to look at her, making the very pulse of my blood beat a strange rhythmic tune, as if in step with the melodies of her nature. My heart went up in silent thanksgiving for the existence of this ideal of young womanhood, whose presence in society would be like the welcome sun-

shine of early summer, which gladdens and glorifies everything it touches. I thought of the separation which must come in the morning, and of the many places, which had acquired, and would henceforth ever possess, a charm from association with this delightful creature.

Ethel returned with a pleased expression, and said, "Professor Bloomfield, there is to be a wedding of two colored people, here in the grove immediately after the children get through dinner. The ceremony is to be performed by father, assisted by the somewhat noted Father Taylor right from the South. Indeed, all Tom and Tot's guests were former slaves and they are to have a kind of jubilee supper. We are invited to witness the ceremony. Would you like to?"

I assured her it would be a great treat, when our attention was called to the road whence the guests were coming almost in a body, and numbering when arrived twelve to fifteen, of all complexions from coal black to pale yellow. There was a general shaking of hands, and hearty welcomes from Tom and Tot, who performed the part of host and hostess with genuine, old-time, plantation hospitality. Fine rows of ivory were to be seen in almost every mouth, stretched from ear to ear, and, while their "pump-handle grip," odd attitudes and droll expressions were very amusing, their simple, whole-hearted, unrestrained greeting was very touching, and, indeed, a refreshing relief from the cold, calculating manners of an overcultured society.

Dr. Blentwood and Father Taylor, as he was called, whose snow-white head and tall form gave him a most venerable appearance, approached, followed by the bride and bridegroom, and a circle was formed, which we joined, and the ceremony commenced. Dr. Blentwood was very happy in the mingling of instruction with his portrayal of wedded life and its responsibilities, evidently intended to help the new pair in the establishment of their united home. Father Taylor offered prayer, which was so original, I will give it as near as I can.

"O, Lord," he said, "when here you did attend a wedding you'sef, and added to de joy of it by supplying good, safe wine when dat fell short, and we knows you is interested in dis yere occasion. Darefore wid confidence we ask you to bless dis yere married pair—not wid wine which dey don't need, but wid Christian honesty and squar commonsense, so dat dey perform deir vows, and raise up a family to de Lord. Dey hab gibben demselves away to each udder, and may dey nebber take back what dey hab gibben. When de fancy and all de moonshine of lub go, may de true, steady sunshine of lub remain, and stay wid em. May dey trust one anudder, and be true to dat trust. May dey walk togedder on de heights ob mutual confidence and placid joy during de heat and burden ob de day, and at night cuddle down togedder in lub, like two turtle doves in one nest. And when de time come for dem to cross de dark ribber, may dey turn up deir

faces for de Lord to wipe away all tears from deir eyes, and den jump into de ole ferry-boat, like chillens goin' to a picnic, and sail shoutin' in de spirit to de udder sho', where is de white robes and de married supper ob de Lamb dat last foreber. Glory dat it last foreber! May we all be dar; but not yet, for we hab a little more work to do. Abundantly bless Brudder Blentwood in his home and work of mercy and his Christian daughter, who is de angel of his heart and de image of his soul, and dese udder godly ones sheltered under deir roof—under all whose kindness we are to partake of one more jubilee feast protected by wide-branching trees, God's first temples. May holy doves of gratitude fly up through de branches from all our hearts whom you did bring out of bondage, as you did the children of Israel, wid a high hand and a outstretch arm; and, unlike dem, may we know how to, have ourselves, now we got out. Here, Lord, we say, amen! So mote it be! Amen and amen!"

The prayer was uttered with so much touching pathos, that I found myself alternately weeping and shaking with suppressed laughter.

Father Taylor was the first in his congratulations. Placing one hand on the head of the bride and the other on that of the bridegroom, he looked down benevolently upon them from his towering height and said, "An undershepherd's blessing go wid ye, young folks." Then taking a hand of each he added, "Keep de boat of

wedded life right side up. When de storm come, stop paddlin' and spend your time preservin' de balance, so dat she dōn't topple ober. If a squall come up from de wife side of de cabin, neber you mind you'sef, Mr. Jenkins, how de squall come, but keep you' eye on de boat till de storm pass and dar be a calm. Den examin' de craft, and see if she leak, and at de fitting time and place administer de proper repairs. Remember, Mr. Jenkins, I put de emphasis on de word proper. And Mrs. Jenkins, if a hurricane strike you widout any warnin' from de male quarter ob de heavens, de very fust question you must ax you'sef is, What can I do to keep de boat from tippin' wid de wind? Keep dat interrogation travelin' round in you head by de Lord's aid, and you may be sartin for sure dat dar will be no sufficient cyclone to swamp you domestic felicity."

This advice was greatly enhanced by Father Taylor's dramatic action, fine voice and expressive features, his tall form now erect and firm, and now swaying in convulsive good-will, and gentle laughter.

As he turned aside, Dr. Blentwood, Ethel and myself shook hands with the newly-married couple, and wished them a happy future. The darkies followed our example, timidly at first, till one fellow, bolder than the rest, with a dandy air, droll step and comical expression, shook both of the bride's hands, saying, as he did so, "You got anudder name, but you looks 'mazing natural," and then he gave her a smack, which sounded

like the collapse of a main-topsail in a storm. This was the signal for general hilarity, and after that the smiling couple each received kisses fast and hearty, till the supply was exhausted.

As they were being seated at table, Miss Blentwood said to me, " I think they will enjoy themselves better now in our absence." I was glad to think so too, since Dr. Blentwood had gone to his study, and I could be alone with Ethel!

CHAPTER XII.

A STROLL BY THE RIVER.

WE moved towards the river, and strolled leisurely on its pleasant banks, chatting familiarly, giving and receiving information on various topics, and drinking in whatever enjoyment we could easily extract from the present, as befitted the closing and languid beauty of a hot June day.

It was one of those hours, when the passing moments are all sufficient,—when we do not need to make excursions into the past or future, but are content to live wholly in the present, making the most of what it has to give, gathering into our nature all its sweet delights, and helpful comforts, in storage for future expenditure, when there is call for outgo and no income of joy.

The sky had a mellow look, the air was soft and balmy, sweet with the perfume of the new-mown hay and blossoms both near and far off. The oriole, the yellow-bird, and bobolink attracted our notice here and there, mostly quiet, uttering only an occasional note or half-note, as if too lazy or too contented to sing. There was not breeze

enough to stir the foliage except the ever trembling aspen leaves, which glistened and shimmered in the rays of the declining sun. We did not wander far, for there was no occasion to hurry, and we examined everything, and enjoyed everything, sometimes sitting down, now to analyze a flower, now to break a stone in pieces and look at its particles through a pocket microscope, which I always carried, and now to watch a sailboat anchored near the opposite shore, the two occupants preferring to lounge and read, rather than use their oars.

When we thought of retracing our steps, the red edge of the sun was scarcely visible above a western hill, and the sky was rapidly changing her robes to a more brilliant hue. The city spires glistened in the red fire of the setting sun, and the gable windows looked as if all ablaze with an internal raging flame, ready to burst out into a conflagration, suggestive of fire-alarms and fire-engines. Yet the hour was so sweet and congenial nothing unpleasant could enter my mind. Happy and grateful as I was, the moments seemed to come and go only to bring me unmerited blessings, and all I had to do was to drink and be filled.

We walked homeward for some time in silence. We did not need to speak. I at least enjoyed a higher communion; for there are passages in our life when speech pulls down, rather than lifts up, and jars on the melody going on in our souls. Words are material, and there are thoughts

sweeter, nobler, purer than any form in which they may be materialized.

So we walked on quietly, observant, yet seeing only sweet design enfolded in every created thing. It was the loveliest twilight I had ever experienced, or else it was my own happy state, which threw a halo of glory upon everything around me.

Did I think of the companion at my side? I thought of everything good and must have thought of her. I seemed to be moving with her in a new and beautiful world, all our own, of which she was the creator, though had I stopped to reason, my title-deed to it would have been utterly wanting. I had received no intimation that I could remain in that world.

We had now reached a bend in the river, where suddenly the music of a guitar fell softly and sweetly on our ears, with the accompaniment of alternating male and female voices. The distance and atmosphere were such as to strain out all harshness, if any there were, and produce the finest effect. We stopped instinctively, and listened without a word of comment. To me it was only an added charm to an already charmed life. Had I caught a glimpse of heaven's landscape, or a breath of its fragrant air, and seen the flitting of an angel's wing, I could not have been much surprised, for I was in heaven, and why should not all loveliest things come to me?

When an interval in the music occurred, Ethel said softly, as if not to disturb the happy illu-

sions of the hour, "One of them is the voice of Charley, I think—Charley Lightheart."

"A connection of the doctor's?" I asked.

"A younger brother," she replied.

The music flowed on, and we listened again, seating ourselves on a rustic seat, encircling a huge elm, whose branches spread out over the water's edge, and cast a somber shadow in the light of the moon, which had come out to take the place of the now departing sun. I quoted the lines of the grand old poet:

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep to our ears; soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony."

"Most befitting the place and the hour!" she said, with a pleased look. "You are very happy in your poetic memories, Professor Bloomfield."

Her face was a study. Blessed memories, noble impulses, and pure aspirations were the divine artists there at work. There was, too, a wealth of love, without which no woman is beautiful, a wealth, however, which showed itself only as a possession held in reserve, except as I had seen it flow out in little delicate and helpful ways to her father, for whom she displayed great admiration and devoted attachment.

The music increased in volume by the added strains of a banjo and mandolin, borne to us now, however, in fitful gusts, by a slightly rising and changeful breeze. Then broke upon our ears a

melody which could have had its birth only on a negro plantation. It would heave and swell like an ocean wave, and then as gradually subside, or sweep by us, and break with an echo on the opposite shore of the river. The negro voices subsiding, the stringed instruments could be heard, producing by contrast a charming effect. Again, instruments and voices, blending together, besieged our ears with augmenting force, as if to take them by storm, and then receded with even sweeter footsteps of harmony, that they might advance upon us separately, like different skirmish lines in battle.

"What does that sic remind you of, Miss Blentwood?" I asked.

She turned towards me with a little surprise, looking out at me between the long-fringed curtains of her expressive eyes, as if I had divined her thoughts.

"I was thinking," she answered, "how all the discords of the world would be done away, if every soul could find and strike the keynote—divine love."

"Your thought is more beautiful than mine," I said slowly. "I was thinking what a sublime coquette music is!"

"Ah!" she questioned, "when can a coquette be sublime?"

"When," I answered, "she unconsciously inspires in a man a longing and love for the morally beautiful, and at the same time stands so far above him, so unattainable, that all he can do is

to gaze and adore, yet glad that he has seen his ideal, and can worship even afar off."

She displayed no consciousness that I meant her, wearing only a more thoughtful look, and I said rather impulsively and too abruptly, I feared: "Miss Blentwood, I wish to ask a favor."

She raised to me questioning eyes, and waited. She was so pretty I had to look at her, and the longer I looked the lovelier she grew, and I must have quite forgotten myself; for, before I knew it, she was really blushing. The sky, which a few moments before, had colored so resplendently in the rays of the setting sun, could not be compared, in richness and brilliancy of tone, to her rosy cheeks and ripened lips.

"The favor I wish to ask," I stammered, in confusion at my own awkwardness, "is the privilege, if you will grant it, of calling you—Ethel."

"Oh, is that all?" she asked with receding color, and a smile breaking into a gentle laugh. "That is a favor easily granted, Professor Bloomfield. Ethel is my name."

"Yes, I know," I said, slowly recovering myself, "and a very pretty name it is, and, liking it, I wish to use it unadorned by prefix or suffix, as a friend, who believes that 'Beauty when unadorned is adorned the most.'"

"As you please," she said, "but you will use your privilege only for a short time, Professor Bloomfield, if you leave us to-morrow morning, as you say. However, you will visit us on your return trip—will you not?"

"Will Ethel please be just a little bit sorry that I am going away, so as to help me come back?" I asked, with poorly-concealed earnestness.

"I shall be sorry to have you go, and glad to have you return, and I know father will say the same." She spoke with all the simplicity of her truthful nature, and I saw in her eyes that she meant it, and I was satisfied. Satisfied? Yes, as to my judgment; no, as to my heart. Friendship was all I had any reason to expect, and it was a great comfort to have the friendly esteem of so noble a girl. When I reflected that it would be months, and perhaps years, before we might meet again, my heart knocked loudly for the privilege of correspondence, but my wiser judgment told me that would be too much to ask on so short acquaintance, though I had to appeal to facts to assure myself that I had not always known her.

Some spirits are indeed so fitly strung as to blend at once, like naturally attuned voices, and without preliminary practice or rehearsal, into sweetest melody. Ethel supplemented my poor half and imperfect notes and satisfied the longings of my heart, and I knew that I knew her; but, as I reflected that that knowledge did not necessarily prove that she knew me, I tried to hush the loud beating of my impatient heart, and to convince myself that I must prove my worth before asking the privilege of even a friendly correspondence with this idol of her father's house.

But the thought of separation on the early morrow from this bright, pure being at my side, grew more and more painful as it forced itself on my mind, and brought home the conviction that I was thinking too much of her—too much for my own happiness. Hitherto in life I had kept my heart with all diligence, determined never to love till my head said where and when. My head approved of the where, but not of the when, if I was loving her now, unless my love asked only friendship in return. I tried to convince myself that that was all that I did ask or expect, and called upon my common sense to witness how absurd it would be to think; at present at least, of anything beyond friendship, or strong friendship at most.

And thus I battled silently in the intervals of conversation, not quite realizing that love had got as quietly, and yet as irretrievably, into my heart, and was at work as effectively as a sun-beam gets into a bud, steadily pushing it wide open to the full rays and complete influence of the sun. Strange to say, in the midst of this tumult of emotions, I was happy, proving that moments of greatest pain may not be entirely inconsistent with the highest heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SERPENT ENTERS MY GARDEN.

WE rose to go, and I was anticipating the supreme happiness of Ethel's exclusive companionship home, when we were almost startled by the splash of oars and the appearance of a boat drawing near propelled by one man, and the jumping ashore of the other occupant, who had been lying lazily in the bow. Leaving his companion to row alone up the river, he approached, and, feigning surprise, saluted Ethel and apologized for intruding on our company. Well, I thought, there is no paradise without a serpent, or something to interfere with its blessedness.

Ethel introduced this metaphorical serpent as Mr. Stockmire, a young merchant, who had recently started business in this growing suburb of the city, and a member of her church. He had a dark complexion, large Roman nose bent a little to one side, and the whole shading and cast of countenance partaking somewhat of the Jewish type, and yet, in view of the unmistakable marks of intelligence which illumined his face, he was what might be called good-looking. In addition

he had an innocent way which, though studied, had all the appearance of having been born with him, and this deception was enforced by a seeming humility and a drawling tone of voice, which, as I afterwards learned, led almost everybody to say, "Stockmire is as honest as the day is long." The state of my heart gave sharpness to my mind, and I read him through as if he had been an open book, although afterwards I began to think I had been mistaken.

"Glad to make your acquaintance," said he, extending his hand in a semi-shy and semi-assertive style. I could not honestly return his compliment. The fact is I was not glad to make his acquaintance. On the contrary, I could have parted with him at that moment with enthusiastic resignation and even signed a petition for his promotion to a consulship in Patagonia or Algiers, or yielded with extreme fortitude to his immediate translation in a whirlwind to heaven; that is, if prepared and it was all the same to him! I had no wish to hurt him, not even his feelings, and so I answered his expressed gladness to see me by saying:

"Thank you, Mr. Stockmire, I hope you had a pleasant sail or row on the river." I knew instinctively he had not rowed any, and I waited to see how this Uriah Heep would answer.

"O, yes," he replied, "we had a lovely sail down stream; but on our return the sails were of no use, and we had hard work rowing against the current."

I felt sure that the "we," who had done the

work, was the other fellow, and I asked, "Did you blister your hands badly, Mr. Stockmire?"

"Oh! no," he said, doubtless fearing I would look at his hands, "my friend was too generous, knowing my wrists were still weak from a sprain, to allow me to do my share of the work. It was very humiliating, and so I landed to relieve him of my weight."

After telling this whopper, which I could see Ethel received as literal truth, he moved from me with a sinuous, twisting, sidelong movement, as if he was accustomed to get through narrow places, and to do it easily without hurting him, however hard it might rub the truth.

Turning to Ethel, he continued, "It did make me feel mighty mean to lie there in the bow like a great lubber, and let that little fellow pull me up the river. If he had been as large as I am, it would have helped my feelings some, but being so much smaller, it was really excruciating."

He spoke so shamefacedly and with such pathetic tones long-drawn out, sounding so very honest, that I did not much wonder that Ethel, in her kindness of heart, wished to relieve him of his apparent mortification, which she did undoubtedly according to his wishes, by saying, "It is a credit to your generosity, Mr. Stockmire, that you take the situation so much to heart; but really I cannot see that it was in the least your fault."

Ah! I thought, this man deceives the very elect. I wonder I do not believe in him. I wanted to say something very ironical, but fear-

ing I might be prejudiced, and, not wishing to disturb the pleasant relations between this parishioner of Dr. Blentwood and Ethel, to whose friends I ought certainly to be polite, I simply said, "I think I saw you and your friend about an hour ago becalmed and reading on the opposite shore?"

"Yes," he answered, "we waited there several hours, hoping there would be wind enough to fill our sail; and so we spent the time over some of Mark Twain's jokes."

We were now ascending a little rise of land commanding a larger sweep of country, from which, however, the light was slowly stealing away before the approaching darkness, which was gently settling down about us, a thin cloud veiling the moon, and dimming the light of an occasional star, narrowing the circle of our vision, but bringing with the change a refreshing coolness, and giving a weird beauty to the landscape. The darkening river lay coiled at our feet like a monster Python asleep, with its scales glistening here and there in the shifting rays of the moonlight, and the maples, which stood guard on its bank, frowned down upon it in deeper shadows, while the soft, sweet, distant sounds of the guitar and mandolin rang out upon the air about us with a subdued and musical echo.

We quickened our pace. The conversation was mostly carried on by Mr. Stockmire, with an occasional comment or question from Ethel, just sufficient to keep his smooth, slow-moving tongue

in steady occupation. I was glad to have it so, as it gave me an excuse to be silent, which I considered my safest course, now that the serpent had got into my garden ; for I felt an occasional righteous impulse to make him describe a semi-circle in the air, and come down into more fitting companionship with the slippery eels and water snakes of the river. This impulse I, of course, checked, and with the thought, Can I be right in my hastily conceived prejudice, and Ethel, who has known him longer, and can judge more dispassionately, wrong? It was not my nature to think evil of any one, and I tried to explain my present mood on Bacon's theory that,

Suspicion among thoughts are like bats among birds;
They ever fly by twilight."

When we reached the place where we had taken our late dinner, and where we expected to find the musicians, who had filled the air with so much melody, lamps were appearing in windows here and there, though it was still light except under the trees, and even there the shadow was sufficiently luminous to make the place and the hour only the more romantic ; for the moon had laid aside her cloudy veil, and was smiling down upon us in every feature of her bright-shining face.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLANTATION DANCE.

THE music had ceased, and while we were wondering where the authors of it could be, a lurid light flamed up through the trees skirting the edge of an embankment just ahead of us, and going there, we discovered on a low flat, hemmed in on three sides by an almost perpendicular ledge with wooded summits, a pile of pitch-pine knots just kindled, and about a dozen colored men and women, old and young, preparing for a dance, and three musicians, two of them white.

"O, what a Charley Lighthead!" said Ethel in a low breath; "he is in his element though, having his fill of enjoyment in the rough, uncouth, untrained, and unrestrained happiness of this recently liberated people. Nothing delights Charley so much as to contribute to the happiness of others, high or low."

The musicians were seated on a log. Charley Lighthead with a mandolin; a young man, whom neither Ethel nor Stockmire recognized, with a guitar; and Tom with a banjo.

The music struck up, and almost simultaneously the whole company was in the air, with arms and

feet flying out in all directions, yet with such good time and ease as to make their movements a mixture of wonderful grace and oddity. From the centre of the plot of ground, where they were grouped, they backed in couples in all directions, advanced, twisted, whirled on one foot, swayed backward and forward, clapped their hands, jumped with both feet and then on one, bowed low, threw kisses, turned their backs on their partners, danced away from them, whirled, advanced, shook hands, laughed, took each other by the arm, whirled together, then separately, placed both hands on each other's shoulders, face to face, then side by side, advanced, retreated, and so on, in almost endless maneuvers, all the while keeping admirable time. It was a plantation-dance, very amusing, and, at the same time, very interesting, as an exhibition of the survival of instincts and characteristics, which in their short stay in the North they had not outgrown.

I was much amused in watching Tom, who seemed the very incarnation of the banjo he was thumbing, so animated was he from head to foot and from shoulder to finger-tips. He appeared wholly lost in, and swayed by, the spirit of the occasion ; and if he had any consciousness at all, he must have thought himself on the old home plantation in Mississippi, where his young feelings grew, and where ties were formed and broken, where loved ones lived and died, but where there were bright spots, as there are in all our lives, which we love to look back upon, and live over

again. His feet kept up a constant clatter on a board beneath them, his body swayed to and fro, sometimes lifting himself entirely from the log on which he sat, his shoulders rose and fell, his head wagg'd, and his elbows flopped, as if he could not keep himself down on the earth, and was ready to fly off into space. Though constantly humming, he occasionally raised a shout as a sort of safety-valve to his overwhelming enthusiasm, while his face wore a strange, wild expression in the lurid light of the pitch-pine knots.

We rose to go, thinking we would steal away and not let the merry-makers know we had seen them; but accidentally or purposely (I never felt quite sure which) a stone, on which Mr. Stockmire had been seated, was loosed from its position, and rolled down over the ledge. I shouted an alarm to the dancers, and then held my breath in mortal fear that one or more would be fatally injured by the large and swift-rolling stone, but the latter buried itself among the burning knots, and spent its force scattering the firebrands, and doing no other damage. The dancers stopped as suddenly as if struck by a thunderbolt, and stood with mouths wide open, transfixed with fear; and poor Tom, so suddenly brought down from his ecstatic flight, was looking round and rubbing his head in great bewilderment.

"Let's slip away, and not let them know what did it," whispered Stockmire. I looked at Ethel, and saw that she, no more than myself, approved of leaving these simple-hearted, but superstitious,

people without an explanation ; and so, clambering down to a small sapling, which, rooted firmly in the crevices of the ledge, leaned out over the little plateau below, and, catching hold of it, I swung myself off, and was let gently down by it within two or three feet of the ground, when I dropped easily, and exclaimed at the same time, "I am glad, good friends, nobody is hurt." I explained the accident as briefly as I could, and, after expressing the hope that it would not interrupt their enjoyment, I turned to thank the musicians for their excellent music.

"Is dat you, Perfessor Boomfield !" cried Tom in great astonishment, holding his banjo in one hand and his hat in the other. "I mose fort de debble come arter me for sure, when de noise came and de fire busted and went flyin' ebery way. I fort maybe my time come. De fac' is, Perfessor Boomfield, I oughtenter be cotched givin' my influence in favor ob de dance. Dr. Blentwood doan, prove of it ; nudder do I in de abstrac', and generally speakin'. But you see all de dancers here are religious folks, and my ole banjo has been in a powerful number ob revival meetin's, and is converted to de Lord togedder wid myself, and dese facts make it big dif' from a unregenerate dance. It transmogrifies it tetotlum, seems to me. Why, Perfessor Boomfield, when de dancers am pious and de music am pious, too, what is de dance but a pious meetin'—de piety spressin' itse'f froo de graceful action and de stringed instrument, rudder dan froo de vocal utterance ? I hope

you cotch de sentiment, and foster my meaning, Perfessor Boomfield."

"I think so, Tom," I answered, controlling my risibilities as best I could ; "but I fear the distinction you make is too metaphysical to convince the worldly-minded."

"Jes' so, persacly, it may be, Perfessor Boomfield, and dat is because dey is obfuscated by sin, and want to make demselves out as good as pious folks. Two pussons may do de same act, peers to me, and one of dem be justified befo' de Lord and de udder condemn. But I'se not gwine to stan' on mootable ground. Dis yere is de las' dance wid me. It is de farewell plantation-dance, de good-bye to de ole times and scenes ob childhood and youth. Wid dis yere dance I shut de do' to de bygone life, sah, and look to de future, and lib in it, sah, as a free citizen ob Massachusetts in de Lord. I jes' wanted to open de ole cabin do', and shake hands wid de ole inmates once mo', and look into deir faces a spell, and den come away foreber."

Tom could say no more ; his voice choked, and he turned away. I confess I was touched by the simple pathos of his closing words and manner. For a moment I could not control my voice from sympathy for the old man, who stood between a past and a future so essentially different, with all his habits formed in harmony with a past civilization, and yet trying with all his might to bring himself into fellowship with a life and a civilization almost entirely new. Do we not expect too much sometimes from those born low down in

life? and would not a little thought enable us to cease wondering why such unusual means as those adopted by the "Salvation Army" reach them where our more refined methods—so refined as to be out of sympathy with them—fail?

Putting a hand on Tom's shoulder, I said almost in a whisper, "God and heaven and progress are forward and not backward, Tom; but this does not imply that you have done any wrong. Go ahead steadily, trusting in the great, patient Teacher, who does not expect you to jump clean out of your past self with one bound.

"Ah! dat is comfortin' sah," said Tom wiping his eyes, "I is glad He can wait for me to creep a little."

Charley Lighthouse and his friend joined us on our way to the house, which we reached in a few minutes.

CHAPTER XV.

A SOIREE AND MONOLOGUE.

WE all went into the parlor, which was already lighted and occupied by two young ladies waiting to see Ethel. The mandolin being a new instrument to me, and having enjoyed it so much, I prevailed on Mr. Lightheart to accompany Ethel with it on the piano. They played together with fine effect, to the great pleasure and satisfaction of all. Charley Lightheart sung a college song, and then we all sang together, both songs and hymns, chatting and laughing in the preludes, interludes, and postludes, till we had chatted, sung and played the evening pleasantly away. The only drawback to me was the lack of opportunity for a secret dialogue with Ethel. I had so many things to say to her, of which I had said nothing as yet, and the thought of going away without saying them, and feeling the inspiration and comfort of her exclusive presence, was relieved only by the privilege of standing beside her and turning the leaves of her music, and by the hope that we might meet again.

Before the party dispersed, Charley Lightheart, with whom I had become rapidly acquainted, and

for whom I felt a strong liking on account of his frank, open nature and cheerful, sunny disposition, had hinted that it would be a pleasure to accompany me down the river, and I had invited him to do so, and he was to be on hand early the next morning.

When I retired that night, I found it difficult to sleep, so many thoughts were crowding my brain, and so many questions asking for a solution. I arose, lifted the curtain of the open window, and looked out upon the night. The stars were shining brilliantly, and the moon was walking the heavens in all her queenly majesty, making strange contrasts of shadow and sheen with the trees and open spaces. The river was flowing smoothly, taking on fantastic shapes under the varied, marginal foliage of the opposite shore, and my eyes followed its course to where it was shadowed by the tall elm on its hither bank, under which Ethel and I had sat and passed the early twilight so pleasantly.

I thought of all she had said in her sweetly accented speech, every mark and turn of her kindly disposition, every grace of manner and expression of her beautiful eyes, and I said almost aloud, "What a treasure she will be for somebody! What a pity if she should be deceived into marrying some one unworthy of her; one who could not appreciate her, and would cause her warm, generous heart to recoil on itself, and wither instead of blossoming like the rose!"

Like every other young man in love, I thought

nobody could make her so happy as I could, nobody appreciate her so thoroughly, care for her so tenderly, or watch so faithfully for the smallest as well as the greatest opportunity to please her, and make her life full of satisfaction.

It did not occur to me that her good father had had years of experience in taking care of her where I had only hours, and knew better than I what her wants were and how to meet them. If I had thought of this, I doubt if it would have made any difference. Her home was the nearest perfection I had ever seen; but it lacked one thing, a certain something more than father, in fact an acknowledged lover or husband, and that lover or husband should be—well, of course, who could fill either place with such absolute devotion to her interests as myself? It would be really too bad, horrid, for her to call herself the wife of any other, and thus fall short of the happiness, she was so worthy of, and so capable of experiencing! It was my duty to shield her from anything less than perfect happiness.

These thoughts did not arise from any overweening notion or self-esteem; for, in fact, I was very humble and self-depreciating. The idea possessing me was, that nobody could love her and anticipate and supply every want, before it was felt, as I could. Like many another in the glow of youth, I felt that no home on this earth was quite up to the home I would have. Mine was to be the ideal home, a paradise, a heaven below, where the strings of its harmony should

never give forth a discordant note, touched, as they always would be, by the gentle fingers of loving thoughtfulness.

But, I asked myself, will she be able to see how happy I can make her? Is there anything in me she can love, so as to suggest that idea to her mind? Was there only friendliness in her eyes when they looked into mine under that elm tree? I could not tell. It was so easy to love her; but it seemed too good to be true, that she, the possessor of such grace and beauty, such wealth of mind and heart, could ever be mine. Then I thought of Stockmire. What if that snake in the grass keeps on deceiving her, as he does everybody else, till she believes him an angel of light! With a sharp pang I crept back into bed, and went to sleep praying that she might be protected from all deception and from all harm, and that God would forgive me if there was any selfish motive in my heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MORNING OF DEPARTURE.

WHEN I awoke from my fitful slumber, the morning was already looking at me through the window with a bright and smiling face, and the birds were twittering their good-morrows from Ethel's favorite maple, whose branches reached my windows as well as hers. Thus sweetly called, I hastily dressed, and sat down, looking out through a screened window at the clear sky, and breathed the fragrant air wafted to me from thousands of blossoms. One or two fleecy clouds in the horizon were blushing in crimson, as if ashamed of their feeble attempts to keep down the day, while the last traces of night, that had taken refuge in a distant and wooded ravine, were being quickly routed by the resistless invasion of light.

I remained a considerable time looking at objects now familiar and dear to me from very pleasant associations. Would I ever look on them again? What influence would this strange adventure of mine have on my future? I had unintentionally invaded this loved home of Dr. Blentwood and his daughter, and we had come into each other's lives, and who, save One, could

foretell the result? With one more look at the big elm on the river bank and the rustic seat encircling it, which seemed to have a peculiar fascination for me, now that the best girl in the world had sat there, and looked at me so kindly, and told me I might call her Ethel, and, with a good-bye to my beautiful room, I took my satchel and went down to the parlor.

Dr. Blentwood, coming in at that moment extended his hand, bidding me a cordial good-morning, and was soon followed by Ethel, whose soft, white hand, I could not help holding a little longer than mere politeness required.

"I hope you rested well, Professor Bloomfield, the last night before your departure," said Ethel, looking at me with her usual bright smile, though with a little touch of sadness, as she spoke the last word.

"Ah! yes," broke in the father, "this is the morning in which you are determined to tear yourself from us."

"That is just the word to express my feelings, doctor," I replied. "It will tear me pretty hard to leave this beautiful home, where I have been so kindly treated and been made to feel so much at home."

"I assure you," responded the doctor, placing a hand on my shoulder in a friendly way, "the tearing is not all on your side. Your coming has brought only brightness and cheer, and we feel indebted to you for getting ill at the right time."

Dr. Blentwood spoke so warmly and with such

evident sincerity beneath his smile, and Ethel looked at me with so much sympathetic approval of what her father had said, I was glad to have breakfast announced, as it gave me time to recover my self-control before I should need to speak again.

We had an extra-fine and royally good breakfast, which I attributed in part to Tom and Tot, who, I was sure, felt a special interest in me, perhaps because they had borne me home in their arms on the night of my insensible arrival; for I have noticed this, that to do a person a kindness is a long step towards loving him, while to do one an injury is a still longer stride towards hating him.

The table-manners, in recognition of God's bounty, I had been pleased to notice, never degenerated, at Dr. Blentwood's, into a formality; but always varied with each meal in harmony with the occasion; and so there was no stiffness after it, requiring a joke to put the guests at their ease by implying that the service, though necessary, didn't mean anything. The doctor and Ethel seemed always to enjoy this service, whether it was the giving of thanks, silent or verbal, the recital of Scripture passages, or loving comment on some phase of Providence. Whatever form the service took, it was so natural and so delightful, that it was a preparation for good digestion, and, therefore, being in harmony with a law of the body, must have been in harmony with its Maker.

This morning the doctor asked me if I had any particular Scripture on my mind, and I repeated the passage most comforting to me at that time, which was, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

"That passage," said the doctor, "is as full of blessed encouragement as this beautiful June morning is of sunshine, and ought to keep every Christian beaming with smiles and ready to take up every apparent burden with gladness of heart. We are too often ungrateful and sad when we cannot see the good, whereas we should always know that the good is somewhere, though we may not at the moment find it. For instance, it is easy to see the working for good of your coming among us; for we have made a valued acquaintance and have been permitted to be of some service to you, and therefore, are thankful and glad, but it is not so easy to see the good of your going, and, therefore, a shade of sadness gathers over us; and yet, while we cannot escape the shadow, we may rejoice at the light streaming down to us from the text you quoted, that all things, without exception, work together for a beneficent end, if accepted in love. Could we look far enough, we might see opportunities for personal help to one or more of us depending on this very departure. God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform."

Should I look back on these words as true prophecy?

We ate our last morning meal together with

considerable cheerfulness, which good Dr. Blentwood held to be a Christian duty as well as privilege. He had not much faith in the giving of thanks at table and then proving by our sadness that we are not grateful.

"We need never to be utterly cast down," he said, "if we always remember not *some* things shall work together for good, but *all* things, and that means everything."

"You would not then," I asked, "regard the providential dealings of God with the Israelites and with individuals in the Bible as exceptional?"

"The Bible," he answered, "gives us a little history to show us that God is in all history. It gives us a touch of biography here and there to show us that God is in all biography, and is ready to direct and control every one's life. Tom and Tot, as well as we three, are each moving under a divine archway of love, which watches and anticipates every want."

"Sometimes we have to wait long," Ethel asserted, "before we can see that love, especially when clothed in disappointments and afflictions."

"Waiting," I responded, "is the hardest trial of faith. Washington waiting at Valley Forge required a truer courage than when facing the enemy in active battle. There is a kindling of enthusiasm, a feeling of heroism, a consciousness of doing something, in an advance, even upon the enemy's guns, which buoys up and bears one on in hope of victory."

"Therein lies the advantage of youth and health

over old age and weakness," said Dr. Blentwood with a smile of resignation ; " for the former can act, when the latter may only wait."

" And yet what a blessing," I interposed, " that when there is no more active service for us in this world, hope is not cut off, but still beckons joyfully to a future of immortal activity, as bright as anything that fills the mind of youth !"

" Yes, and how gloriously the ripening spirit, in the midst of approaching disease and old age, may reflect, for the benefit of others, like the setting sun upon the clouds, the rosiest and most resplendent hues !" said Ethel, as she looked lovingly towards her father.

This delicate tribute of daughter to parent I felt to be as sweet as it was poetic and as beautiful as it was real.

When the meal was over, the servants were called in, and we had singing. I read the Scriptures, and the doctor's prayer was so appropriate and touching, remembering me in it so fully and tenderly, I was much moved, and when he closed, we all, even to Tom and Tot, murmured a responsive Amen in unison.

We were entering the hall from the dining-room, when, through the open outer door riverward, Charley Lightheart appeared, swinging his hat at us, and singing out, " All aboard for downstream ; land lubbers will go ashore."

" Are you ready so soon ?" Ethel asked, as he came up.

" Completely equipped," he replied, with a

military salute, "and awaiting the captain's orders. All my plunder is down there in the boat, surrounded by fish standing up perpendicular in the water, and looking with strained eyes at the good victuals, which they smell! It is only a proof what tempting morsels my Dolly can cook."

"Who is Dolly, you naughty boy?" asked Ethel, more than suspecting that he referred ironically to his sister-in-law.

Putting his hand on his heart and groaning, he replied, "It is too early in my career to tell you who Dolly is."

Tom had got my boat down below the rapids the night before, and we were to embark nearly opposite the house. I took my hat, and was extending my hand to say good-bye, when the doctor said, "We will accompany you to the boat." I went to the kitchen to say farewell to Tot, who, as I shook her hand, exclaimed, "Is you 'deed guine, sah? God bress you bery much, all de time. You mus' come back; for de good doctor and dear Miss Ethel will want to see ye, I knows for sure. We filled de box 'fore ye was up, and Tom, who made de box, is done gone wid it to de boat. Miss Ethel were mighty tickler what went into de box for ye, sah. She dotes on ye, I rekon, and ye oughter come back and seen her and the res' of us, as we all sets heaps on ye too. De Lord be wid ye, honey, and hab marcy on you soul and body. Dat's Tot's prayer, and de prayer is white, if poor ole Tot's face be brack. It's de innards God looks at, I reckon."

Though amused at her expressions, I assured her of the truth, that I had as much confidence in her prayers as if she was white, and the finest lady in the land, and with this assurance, after putting a piece of money in her hand, I left the kind, simple-hearted, old woman, and rejoined the party, who were waiting for me on the lawn.

There was no chance to talk with Ethel alone, but I managed to walk between her and her father, and took the liberty I fear, scarcely knowing what I did in this parting hour, of taking her arm as well as his and holding both till we reached the shore. Every step was a step towards separation, perhaps forever, and this thought revealed to me that I was loving this girl tenfold more than I had hitherto been conscious.

I had always intended to be wise, and not allow myself to love where there was no hope; but here I was without a particle of heart left in me, and no assurance of Ethel's in return. I had been imprudent, but what could I do about it now? I did not know. I was greatly perplexed what to do. It was not clear that I could do anything. I felt keenly that I was on the borders of Paradise, the Paradise of all my hopes of earthly happiness, and might never be so near again, and if I took her arm in the fear of losing her, what wonder? How could I help it, I should like to know? What need was there of trying? I don't believe I did try. Trying would not make the Connecticut River flow up stream!

CHAPTER XVII.

CHARLEY LIGHTHEART TAKES THE HELM.

BUT, as before intimated, I do not know what I did. I only know that, when I left her side, and jumped into the boat, I felt as if I had fallen down out of heaven, and the door was closed against me, perhaps forever. I was so agitated, so dazed, I do not recall what I said to any of them, as I shook hands, and bade them good-bye. That I was a fool for falling so hopelessly in love was clear; but, having lost my wits, I might as well remain a fool, I thought, and would anyway, persuading myself that the pain of being a fool of that kind was sweeter than the rewards of being wise.

Though I cannot recall words, I remember the strange thrill which ran through me as I took Ethel's pretty white hand, and pressed it, I don't know how hard, and looked into her tender, liquid eyes, so deep and yet so full of light ineffable; and I remember also how they all looked as we left them—Tom with his cap under his arm sitting on the empty wheelbarrow, on which he had trundled my things, looking a little disconsolate, and Dr. Blentwood and his beloved daughter standing

erect and waving their handkerchiefs in affectionate farewell. Never shall I forget the beautiful picture they presented, especially Ethel, with her wind-tossed ringlets, fair face, and superb form clothed in a white morning dress symbolic of the purity of her spirit.

When we passed the point of land where Ethel and I had sat under the wide-spreading elm, and while I was waving back my adieus, and watching Ethel with longing eyes, Charley purposely hugged the shore, shutting her and her father off from view. I begged him to point the bow out towards the centre of the river, that I might see them once more, "just once more"; but he was inexorable.

"You must save your eyes, friend Bloomfield," said he, "they are sore now from over-straining."

"Oh, bother my eyes, if I cannot see them again!" I exclaimed.

"Remember, my dear brother," he replied with mock gravity, "you have need of eyes going down the river; indeed, everywhere eyes are an important adjunct to the genus homo. As the son and brother of a physician, I really cannot allow you to strain them by looking again, at long range against the wind, at the Blentwoods. Indeed, I must be firm, as a wise custodian, where the health of your eyes is concerned."

"Have it your own way," I said, half petulantly and yet with a lugubrious smile at his drollery, as I lay down in the bow of the boat, and gave myself up to reflection. What if I should never see Ethel again? I queried, or see her only too late

after her engagement or marriage to another? Too late!—what an awful thought! And then Stockmire came into my mind. What if this hypocrite should gain the hand of that angel!

“Lightheart,” I exclaimed, rousing up—

“Call me Charley,” he interrupted. “When in company you may address me by the more dignified title; but here, between you and me, I prefer the great condescension of allowing you to call me Charley. The feeling of humility, which this permission begets, does me good, and I enjoy it. Call me simply Charley; that and nothing more.”

“Well,” I resumed, “simple Charley——”

“Omit the adjective,” he interrupted again, bowing low and removing his cap. “It ill becomes me to listen to flattery, after I have decided to humble myself.”

“Charley,” I resumed once more, “do people believe in Stockmire?”

“He is held to be an honest, respectable, industrious, and successful business man,” he replied.

“But is he sincere, conscientious, and always what he pretends to be?”

“He is so accepted generally, I think.”

“Do the Blentwoods think highly of him?”

“I have no reason to suspect otherwise.”

“Is he after Ethel—in love with her?”

“I should not wonder; everybody is, unless you are an exception.”

This did not comfort me much, and I exclaimed, “Depend upon it, Stockmire is a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

"Ah!" said he with a wise look, "you may flatter Stockmire as much as you please. But didn't you notice how very honest he talks? That drawl of his proclaims him genuine to most of folks without any further recommendation."

"I know it, and therein lies his dangerous power; but I could not trust him. I have a feeling, I can't tell why, that he works his way underhandedly, and will carry a point apologetically, under cover of humility and the pretended pressure of other people's opinions, which he is not above forging to suit his purpose."

"Well, well! for an extemporaneous judgment, you hew pretty close to the line, methinks," murmured Charley half to himself.

"Watch him, study him, and if my judgment proves true, warn Ethel in time."

"Yes, yes; but why are you so desperately in earnest and solemn about it?"

"Because that girl is innocent-hearted, unsuspecting, and worthy of the best man that ever lived, and it would be monstrous, murderous, an awful criminal blunder in her friends, to permit her to go unwarned into the sacred bands of wedlock with a heartless man capable of developing into—I dare not say what."

After a pause Charley raised his eyes to me and said abruptly, "Elbert Bloomfield——"

I stopped him with, "Simply Elbert, if you please; just that and nothing more."

He waved his hand in deprecation, and went on, "Elbert, my son, you are in love."

"In love," I exclaimed; "do you know anything about love? Were you ever in love, Charley?"

He dropped the paddle with which he was toying, stood up as straight as an arrow, and, with head erect, smote on his breast, and said, looking down on me with well-feigned superiority, "I am a free man, free in body, free in mind, free in heart."

"You ought to pose for some comic almanac," said I, laughing for the first time.

He went on unheeding. "Young man, I am sorry for you. Falling in love, as has been well said, implies that love is beneath one. The girls, I admit, are winsome—very pretty to look at, but my dear fellow, beware! Love is a snare; at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder!"

He then went off into an eloquent peroration, exhorting me to flee from love as from a pestilence. Seeing that he was about to resume his seat, and wishing to be entertained further, I asked, "What makes you think I am in love?"

Turning away his head he thrust back his hands with a repellent gesture, very dramatically, as much as to say, some things are too obvious to be discussed.

"Well," I said, "if you will have it so, it can only elevate and ennoble a man to love a person like Ethel Blentwood."

"Ah!" he replied with a pitying look, "I perceive that the chains of love's sophistry are already about your neck. That you esteem Ethel very highly is an honor to you, but I conjure you,

as you value your massive brain, to love no woman ; for it will make a fool of you. Fasten your affections on me."

"No, Charley, I claim my right to be a fool."

"No man, Elbert, has a right to *make* a fool of himself."

"What reasons have you for that, Charley?"

"Well, my boy, as I must make a Dombey effort to save you, I will give them. In the first place, there are born fools enough without the making of any out of sensible people ; and, secondly, a man should make the most of himself, and—and to be a fool is not the best thing one can become."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, Elbert ! thou art already hopelessly entangled in the subtle meshes of metaphysics, poor love-lost boy !"

"No, Charley, the question has been seriously raised by German philosophers, who, in their despair of explaining the problems of life, have recently declared it preferable to be a flat-headed Indian and a fool than to be wise. A fool has no such anxiety, and has no need to commit suicide, as some wise ones have done, to escape the misery of thinking on the awful and inexplicable mysteries of life."

I saw I had puzzled him, and it amused me to see him rack his brain, and run his fingers through his hair, as if to open spaces for ideas to enter, looking wise all the while, and pretending he was only halting to show his contempt for such

reasoning. At last he ventured the following:

"Every blessing has its penalty attached to it, and the penalty of having nerves is pain, but would you become an oyster for the sake of freedom from pain?"

"Your implied argument, Charley, does not quite meet the case. The question is not who would or who wouldn't, but which is the happier state, that of the wise man who thinks and suffers, or that of the fool who has no care. The only escape from this philosophy of despair for a worldly wise man is, I think, to become a Christian. Jesus of Nazareth casts a light upon earth's path, and the light and love revealed by Him can alone give rest to the overburdened brain, and make thinking a painless pleasure. Education out of Christ may bring misery and despair, as the mere worldling has experienced; but in Christ the more one knows the nobler and deeper his joys."

Charley dropped his head, the fun all gone out of his face, for he was not a professed Christian; but rallying, that he might not appear too serious, he took up his assumed dignity again and said, "My brother, I am glad to find your mind has not all gone down into the jelly-pot of love. You have answered well. I could not have done better myself. There is great hope of you yet. I am more encouraged than ever to do my best to rescue you from the morass of love into which you have fallen, and where the more you

struggle alone, the deeper you will sink into the mire."

"Stockmire?" I asked.

"Ah!" he said, "the clutches of Stockmire are no comparison to——"

He never finished that sentence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN INVOLUNTARY BATH.

CHARLEY was standing with both feet close to the side of the boat, and so had no room to enlarge his base of support in that direction, and, the sail striking him in the midst of his sentence, his efforts to regain the perpendicular only made matters worse, and over he went into the water, and shut the door behind him. When he saw he must go, however, the ludicrousness of his situation struck him, and he said, as he went down, "Will see you later." I watched him, and when he came up I could just reach him astern, and, hauling him to me, I assisted him into the boat.

"As I was saying," he went on as soon as he got seated, and as if nothing had happened, the water still running down his face, and his hair and clothes clinging to him like the fur to a drowned rat, "as I was saying, when my attention was called to the river bottom——"

"Oh, don't!" I interrupted, laughing so heartily that I could scarcely speak. "I am more interested now in another question."

He looked at me with quiet dignity, more pleased to see me laugh, I know, than anything I

could do, and with his imperishable good nature beaming in every feature, he said bowing, "I am bound to respect your curiosity, my boy. Please state your question, and I shall only be too glad to impart to you any desired information."

"Well," said I, between gasps for breath and repeated outbursts of unmanageable laughter, "what in the world were you diving after beneath the surface of the river? Tell me that, will you?"

"Don't you know?" said he, with well-assumed and grave earnestness. "I thought my conduct perfectly clear. But I forget that you are not a paleontologist, nor an antiquarian of any sort. To answer your question, then, categorically, Elbert, I was diving after the buried treasures of experience. I have learned not to let opportunities to gain information slip by me unused. In fact, I watch for them, and seeing one of these I went for it, suddenly, it is true, for it was then or never. It may have seemed impolite to leave you in the middle of a sentence; but the sentence could wait, while a lost opportunity is lost forever. Are you satisfied? Is the wisdom of my conduct clear to you now?"

"Clear as daylight," I shouted, as soon as I could command my vocal organs; "and now, for the future welfare of the paleontologist, I suggest that we seize upon the opportunity of going ashore in that sheltered nook or bay, just ahead of us, where you can change your clothes, and have them drying in the sun, while we eat dinner."

"A capital idea, Elbert, I think your mind

gives evidence of being fully restored now to its former state of health."

We landed, and after drawing our boat well up on the beach and looking about, we were both agreed that a better place for our purpose could not have been found. Charley rapidly disrobed, wrung out his clothes and hung them on poles stuck in the sand, and with plenty of underclothing in his satchel he was soon dressed in dry, white linen. The weather was warm, and he was more comfortable without than with his outer garments, and as he stood in bright slippers combing his hair by the aid of a pocket mirror, I could not but admire his neat and comfortable appearance.

He was a fine-looking fellow, well built, of a rather florid complexion, dark auburn hair, that made me think of Ethel's; full, blue-gray eyes, that twinkled and snapped, and told beforehand almost what he was going to say, and a face broad at top, and narrowing down to a rather small chin.

"White becomes you, Charley," I said.

"That is what my mother used to say," he replied, putting his mobile features into one of those fun-provoking expressions, which he seemed to possess in almost infinite variety, "and it reminds me to say to you as the result of my ample experience, the treasures of which you have seen me ready to dive after, even at the risk of being impolite, that it is the duty of every man to look attractive in his night clothes."

"Ancient and sapient sir, how long have you lived, pray?"

"Thousands of years longer than the centenarian, who counts his age by clock-time; for I have travelled faithfully over the varied fields of imagination and research till my tread has become heavy under the staggering weight of accumulated knowledge!"

"That is as much as I can stand," I said, "until after dinner, and I adjourn the meeting."

We found a very pleasant dining-spot, grassy, and provided with a log for a seat, and shaded by an oak, near the edge of the bluff forming a part of the little bay in which our small craft was sheltered, and reached therefrom by a gradual ascent. Here we tugged our boxes containing our food. I confess I had some curiosity to see what Ethel and Tot had provided for me. Anything, I thought, which Ethel had cooked, or ordered, or smiled upon, even a crust from her hands, I could eat with a relish.

Tom had made a very convenient box, with pockets, shelves and all needed partitions to prevent the food from being jammed or mixed, doubtless under the superintendence of Ethel; and, as I lifted the cover, and looked in, and took out dish after dish, and saw how much thought had been expended for my comfort, I exclaimed, unaware I was thinking aloud, "The dear girl!"

Charley either did not hear, or pretended not to, being busy with his own "cupboard," as he called it, and, much relieved, I could let my

thoughts flow back to Ethel once more as I examined my bill of fare. There were pies, cakes, tarts, turnovers, hard-boiled eggs, pickles, pepper, salt, sandwiches, chicken-pie, strawberry short-cake, and a tin box labeled, "Pour this over the short-cake." There were other delicacies and creature comforts, but I could not examine further just then, and, turning to Charley, I asked with enthusiasm, "Do you know what is the prime, essential quality of an angel?"

"Of course I do," Charley quickly answered; "it lies in the wings."

"Hens have wings, child, and hens are not angels," I remonstrated. "We associate wings with angels merely to symbolize their swiftness."

"True," he responded with diplomatic shrewdness, "but what is swifter than love? Love and wings are synonymous, almost identical; for love is so full of wings within and without, that you cannot cut away the smallest portion without clipping its wings also. A wingless love is a misnomer in man or angel. What is it that wings the early bird with a worm in its mouth to its patient mate or young? Is it not love? What is it that has just now winged the soul of Elbert Bloomfield back to Graynoble with the swiftness of lightning, and made his face all aglow with the vision of Ethel Blentwood? Could the vision have been possible without wings of love?"

"Who now," I asked with some embarrassment, "is floundering in the sophistries of metaphysics?"

"Ah!" said he with mouth agape, as if astounded at my question; and then relaxing and blinking, quietly asked, "Please give us your definition of the highest angelic quality."

"Well, Charley, I think it is that kind of love known as thoughtfulness for the welfare of others."

Promptly straightening himself, he asseverated, "I accept your terminology with great joy. It shows you quite out of the bog and quicksands and standing on solid granite. Thoughtfulness for others, I freely admit, will make a present heaven anywhere, everywhere." And he took off his hat in profound respect to his own remark.

"Charley," said I, "you must dine with me to day. This short-cake will never be so good again as now, and here is enough for us both."

He looked longingly at the tempting dish and replied, "Out of pure regard to you, my dear friend, and for the sake of the economics of life, I accept your pressing invitation."

We sat down on the grass resting our backs against the log we had proposed for a seat, and, with a wooden plate in each lap containing half of my strawberry short-cake covered with delicious cream, ate, with ancient fork and tin-spoon and with many blessings on Ethel and Tot, a very hearty meal. For drink we had a bottle of cold coffee diluted to our taste by "oirnon catholicon" or the universal wine, which bubbled up pure and fresh from a spring in the bay below.

"Charley," said I holding up a mica cup of this sparkling water, "thousands upon thousands not only waste their twenty years, like Rip Van Winkle, but desolate their whole lives and the lives of others, because they reject this wine of Nature for the fire-water of Satan."

"Truth, every word truth," responded Charley, holding up another cup of the same cool, clear beverage; "you do speak forth the words of truth and soberness, and, therefore, in the language of poor deluded Winkle, may you live long and prosper." He drank the last drop in his cup, and set it down with a complaisant nod, adding, as he did so, "Thus endeth our first dinner together after leaving the classic shades of Graynoble."

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER-DINNER EXERCISE

"WHAT say for a walk, Charley?"

"My lord, thou speakest mine own thoughts," he replied. "A gentle stroll will be a friendly act towards the short-cake I am outside of, and may prevent the employees in the great laboratory of my stomach from striking ere their work of mysterious chemistry be complete."

"Were not our Creator a benevolent being," I said, "this process, which we think so little about, might be very painful instead of the pleasant thing it is."

"That's so," said Charley, stopping a moment as if struck with a new idea; "I never thought of that before. Good! How He could rack and torture us with every mouthful digested, if so minded!"

"And what conclusion do you draw from this, Charley?"

"This clearly, that a malevolent Creator would put an end to all pleasure in eating strawberry short-cake though direct from the hands of so lovely a creature as Ethel Blentwood. Factum

factorum! what would become of all the fine suppers and the sociability of the world, if guests at table knew, that for every pleasurable sensation in the palate, they must pay tenfold in pains of the stomach? Glad 't isn't so, chum."

"Towards whom are you glad, Charley?"

"My dear Elbert, I am glad first for myself; and then my gratitude goes on to the inventors of agricultural tools; to the farmer who ploughs and sows and reaps and thrashes and winnows; to the miller who grinds; to the inventor of yeast cake, though I would rather bread be raised without it; to the purveyors of condiments; and especially to the good cook, black, white or yellow. I should not omit to add, however, that I eat with a keener relish when a pretty girl, like Ethel, prepares the viands. If you ever get married, my boy, stipulate that your wife do the cooking. How much happier the world would be, if wives took as much pride in cooking as in piano-playing, or painting or any other accomplishment! Why don't they? Ah! my dear Elbert, therein lies the weakness of the female mind."

"Why do you leave out, in your gratitude, the very Being whom you have virtually admitted to be the source of all the pleasure of eating?" I asked, determined not to be led from my main point.

"If I am grateful," he replied soberly, "to the creatures who serve me, am I not thereby grateful to the Creator?"

"Not necessarily, although you cannot be truly

thankful to the Creator with no gratitude to the creature. If a man love not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? The greater includes the less, but the converse of this may not be true."

"But why need I declare gratitude to Deity?"

"For your own good, and the fitness of things."

"How for my good?"

"Gratitude unexpressed soon dies."

"But I do express it towards men."

"And that keeps it alive towards men."

"Is not that practically enough?"

"No, not enough. The man, who fails to put himself into direct communication with God Himself, suffers a great loss."

"How?"

"To refuse is in itself hardening to all the better feelings; besides, not being linked to Him by personal sympathy, there is a lack of inward inspiration and the helpful influence of God's Spirit."

"Does not that Spirit shine upon all?"

"Certainly, and so does the sun shine upon that ledge yonder as well as on this green turf we are treading, and what a difference! The ledge gives back no visible token, while the responsive turf throws up towards heaven a beautiful vegetation, as if in grateful acknowledgment of blessings received."

Charley Lightheart was silent for some moments and seriously thinking.

"Elbert," he asked slowly, "are not the ledges

doing all they are capable of doing in return for the sun's rays?"

"I suppose so," I answered, anticipating his point; "but are you doing all you can to prove your appreciation of the Divine Benevolence, whose rays have been falling on you every moment of your life?"

A long silence followed, which I would not break, knowing it to be well employed. At length he stopped me, and, putting a hand on each of my shoulders, and looking me directly in the eye, said, "You are the most sensible on religious subjects of any one I ever met. Now, I ask in all candor, do you really believe any change can take place in me, through faith in God, corresponding in the slightest degree to the difference between that ledge towards which we are travelling, and the springing vegetation beneath our feet?"

"We must remember Charley, that all physical illustrations are imperfect, and are used as aids to the imagination and not as literal correspondence. You may be very near the kingdom (and I wish you would step into it at once), and may only need to recognize God's personal love to bring your whole heart into joyful union with Him. The change in you would be chiefly within; for outwardly you are already moral, thoughtful for others, and upright in all your dealings, pretty good evidence, one might say, that you are a Christian already in spirit without knowing it. An acknowledged conscious love for God would

give you a deeper peace, increased joy, sweeter views of life, and a nobler charity ; but to the on-looker you could not have a marked change, like the conversion of the outwardly wicked."

"But, Bloomfield, do you think church members are really any better than the so-called world's people?"

"On the whole, yes ; although there are many and grave exceptions."

"Don't the exceptions spoil the rule?"

"No, the counterfeit coin proves the genuine. People do not counterfeit that which is worthless. Besides, are not all the best people you know either in the church or respectful attendants on its service?"

"Yes, that I think is so ; but there are so many church members, who exhibit anything save a Christian spirit, to say nothing of square dealing!"

"Too true, Charley, but it is not the fault of Christianity. Some people have a great deal of piety, but not a particle of religion! They talk gushingly, or are great sticklers for forms and ceremonies and the avoidance of amusements, but their conduct shows their piety to have no moral fibre, and that Christianity never got any intelligent hold on them."

"I have seen so many of that class, whose talk has been the merest cant, or the most drivelling nonsense, when not the most outrageous blasphemy, that I have been disgusted and repelled from the very thought of publicly professing Chris-

tianity. To profess more than what is possessed is a crime against decency and humanity, and for one I prefer not to profess, but in secret to possess, and to walk honestly and manfully before God and man. To live truly is my desire, but to put on the forms of piety, save in my own closet, is, in view of what I see around me, repugnant to all my notions of real manliness."

He spoke warmly.

"What, to be more specific, have you observed, Charley?" I asked, wishing to get at his difficulty.

"I have observed churches exhibiting as much selfishness as any worldlings. I have seen members full of religion on Sundays and in prayer-meetings, but never carrying any of it into their business. I know of women who talk pious twang, profess the severest creed, bow their heads on entering church, sorrow over their unconverted husbands, and yet, by their very peevish, snappish, fretful, uncontrolled temper, drive those same husbands from their homes, and then complain because they are not more at home. You must have noted that my pious sister-in-law would make a hell where her husband would make a heaven, and does not God know the honest good heart of my brother as surely as he knows the mere technical religion of his wife?"

"Anything else, Charley?"

"Yes, I heard a native Missouri preacher, who had been a "bushwhacker" in the civil war, killing our boys individually in irregular, murderous warfare, say from the pulpit, that failing to join a

church was a sin big enough to damn a world, and yet, the audience swallowed him metaphorically, and let the drivelling rascal preach on!

"Near literary Boston I heard an intelligent-looking man say in prayer-meeting, that to go to a theatre was sin enough to send a man to hell forever, and yet that pious twaddle went unrebuked, when some, at least, who heard him, knew that in business he cheated and lied shamefully. Only think of his knocking at heaven's gate, and offering as his only qualification for admittance, that he never went to a theatre! When I see men vapping against mere technical sins of their own construction, I always suspect that they are trying to erect a platform on which they can stand."

"Have you finished?"

"No, one thing more burns in my heart, and I must open the safety-valve and let it out. I know a preacher who, for fifteen years has, like his Master, been going about doing good, visiting and praying with the sick and the sorrowing, preaching to the poor and the imprisoned, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked! More than a hundred otherwise unprotected children, whom he has adopted and cared for, are growing up to call him blessed. And yet, this devoted, godly man, solely because he is a Universalist, and believes that all will finally repent and be made fit to be saved, was refused admittance at a funeral into a so-called evangelical pulpit, though requested to officiate with the pastor! Where is

the evangel in such conduct as that? Where is the sweet gospel principle, which would lead a man to stalk so ruthlessly into the presence of death, and wound afresh hearts already lacerated and bleeding under the heavy loss of a near and dear one gone?"

"Was it a matter of conscience with the pastor?" I asked almost in a whisper.

"He so claims; but that is the kind of conscience, which, in the early Romish church, blessed the knife that was to drink the blood of a Protestant. I freely accord liberty of opinion to a narrow mind as well as to a broad one, when that liberty is not accompanied with a blow. Had it been on any other occasion, I would not mention it here as an objection to a Christian profession, but when in the presence of death, where all ranks are levelled and all distinctions are done away, where the war drums cease to throb and the battle flags are furled, what shall we say of a conscience which leads a man to clang his iron-bound creed, as a Goliath might his heavy armor, displaying its sharp points over the dead body of one of his own church members, a wife and mother in Israel, in utter disregard of her dying wish, and, too, when everybody else is weeping tears of sympathetic sorrow! When a creed takes the heart out of a man, like that, it savors more of the satanic than of the Godlike. Think of the awful sacredness of a dying request! Professor Bloomfield, could you, would you have refused that request?"

He trembled with emotion, and almost equally moved I answered, "Oh! Charley, you know I would burn at the stake rather than do such a thing. But we must soften our judgment of this pastor with the thought that men's minds and consciences often play strange tricks with them. He doubtless reasoned that to admit a Universalist into his pulpit, even at a funeral and for the sake of a dying request, would be wickedly countenancing a grave error; and, perhaps, he took credit to himself for suppressing his sympathies in accordance with his own ideas of loyalty to the dead and living!"

"On that ground you may lessen the guilt of the Spanish Inquisition."

"Perhaps so, Charley, for its supporters reasoned, or pretended to reason, that it was better to kill a heretic than to let him ruin himself and others too!"

"That only proves a conscientious devil the worst kind of a devil, and, also, that a human heart may be, as the Bible says, deceitful and desperately wicked. The pastor referred to, it seems to me, and the Spanish Inquisitors reasoned in the same way, both moved by denominational selfishness, assuming that no one but themselves had a conscience, and both willing to inflict suffering, physical or mental, not on themselves, indeed, but upon others, to maintain the supremacy of their creed and of themselves. I tell you, Elbert, the modern Pharisee, had he the power of the State behind him, could no more be trusted

with our liberties than the ancient Pharisee, or the slayer of the Huguenots."

"Well, Charley, admitting all you would imply against these men, would you present them as representatives of real Christianity?"

"They are allowed to represent it."

"Too much so, I admit, but the Author of Christianity does not allow them to represent it; for He calls them hypocrites, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. His severest denunciations were against church members of their class, who were so puffed up with spiritual pride that they could not learn anything outside of their own circle of ideas; and hence it was that publicans and harlots, who were more teachable, would go into the kingdom of heaven before them. It is the heart, the spirit, or the love, which is of prime importance according to Jesus. Paul tells us that love is the greatest of Christian virtues. That man is to be pitied, therefore, whose sympathies, whose humanity, and whose higher and holier instincts are swallowed up by the faulty logic of an inhuman, self-glorifying creed, or, if you will, by a faulty deduction from a faultless belief; for a man may have an infinite creed and, at the same time an infinitesimal heart! But, Charley, there are large-hearted, straightforward, thorough-going, high-toned Christians, and I very much wish to see their number augmented by your public enrollment among them. They need you, and true Christianity needs you."

CHAPTER XX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

WE had now reached the elevated ledge, which was our objective aim, and ceased our conversation to look about us and enjoy the view. Below us a sun-lit valley stretched away to the north, and, winding through it, lay the smooth waters of the Connecticut, apparently as motionless as if fast asleep and unruffled by a dream. On either side were beautiful intervals and cultivated fields, from which rose hills of more or less grandeur, some with wooded summits, and all prophetic of warmth and food for man and beast. Over our heads the branch of an elm, rooted in the soil far below us, spread itself out like an umbrella to shield us from the hot sun. In it hung, half-concealed, a long oriole's nest, swaying in the gentle breeze, and revealed to us by the appearance of the male bird of bright plumage, the most beautiful our country affords, impelled by a God-given instinct, carrying in his beak a worm with which to feed his housewifely mate.

I was dilating on the footsteps of God and man, brought out in such pleasing contrast in the panorama before us, when Charley stepped for-

ward towards the edge of the bluff to get another view, but delayed midway to pluck a tiny flower growing in a crevice of the rock, and during that momentary delay, and just as he was about to step over the fissure, the great rock there parted beneath his very feet, leaving one foot projecting over the dizzy height, and fell with a tremendous, reverberating crash, imbedding half its size in the earth below, the upper half breaking off and rolling and bounding with a fearful velocity down a steep ravine towards the river, carrying everything before it. Charley wavered on the brink of the fearful precipice from vertigo or the draft of air set in motion by the rock-slide; but as I sprang to grasp him, he rallied to a safe footing, and we looked at each other in silence, and took a long breath of relief.

"What a narrow escape!" I exclaimed, trembling with mingled excitement and thanksgiving for his safety.

"A pretty close call!" said Charley, trying to smile. "Had I not stopped to pluck that flower, I should have been on the wrong side of that fissure, and gone down with the falling rock to my death."

"God has saved you," I said warmly, grasping one of his arms in both of my hands, as if to make sure of him. "Give Him the praise."

"Was it not the flower, and my love for it, that kept me from taking the fatal step?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "they were the tangible

instruments; but God caused that flower to grow, and gave you the impulse to enjoy it."

"Do you mean to say God worked a miracle to save my life?"

"Certainly not; but is it too much for you to believe that an infinite Being of unlimited knowledge must have seen you on this rock when He created this world, and, therefore, must have taken your perilous condition into account? The laws of disintegration and gravitation, which carried away that rock, are laws of God, and so also are the laws of germination and growth which produced that flower. No law has been violated, and yet you have been saved by Divine Providence as surely as if God had stretched out a visible hand to draw you back from that brink of death."

"If God at creation arranged to save me from violent death to-day, it seems an ice-cold, long time ago that he took an interest in me! Does He care for me now? That is what I want to know."

"Remember, Charley, that I said, 'took you into account,' which, of course, must be true, else the Creator was not omniscient when arranging and unfolding his plans; and bear in mind, too, that God *is* in all his works—not *was* in them at creation merely. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, and the past and future are not separated in His mind, as in ours. We think one thought, and then drop it before we can think another; but with God all times and all thoughts

are ever and always present. All things with Him are as one eternal now. This faulty expression is, perhaps, the best hint I can give you of what I mean. And when I say, He took your life into account at creation, I mean that He made room for you, and made His plans large enough to provide for every circumstance in your life without breaking any of His own laws, or interfering with the established order of things."

"You mean to say, then, that He was just now actively employed in keeping me from that one step, which would have proved my probable death?"

"I do. Because God acts continuously and methodically, and so uniformly that we can count on it, is no proof that He does not act at all, but is, on the contrary, the very best proof of His all-wise and all-powerful management. A finite and unwise mind may have to change his plans to meet every new case; but with God there are no new cases, and no need of afterthoughts to provide for them. Jesus says, 'My Father worketh hitherto and I work.' The world is full of His life-giving and active presence. He is in the Providence that hovers over the robin's nest swinging above our heads. He is in all this springing life of field and forest before us. He is mirrored in the heavens above us, and in the calm depths of the river below us. He is in every flower, as well as the one you hold in your hand. I think flowers, especially, must

“speak to you hereafter more forcefully of God than they ever have done before.”

“Yes,” he answered, holding up the tiny flower, “I realize the truth of Mary Ainge De Vere’s words :

‘ Sometimes a little flower will tell us more
Of God’s good wisdom than the grandest words
That ever preacher preached or organ chords
Thundered within the temple’s sacred door!
A flying seed wafted on busy wind,
A bird-nest hiding where the branches lean,
A glimpse of sunlit valley, left behind,
With sweet homes nestled in the living green,
Some friendly voice that greets us on the road
In common salutation brief and kind,
A gentle glance by stranger eyes bestowed,
The dear face of a child with tender meaning lined,
A lonely grave where violet buds have blown—
These are the presents by which God is known.’ ”

“Where did you learn that?” I asked.

“In the church one Sunday when the sermon was dull. I found it on a slip of paper between the leaves of a hymn-book, and I learned it to repeat to my mother the following Sunday in expiation of my purpose to take a walk into the woods instead of the meeting-house.”

“Well, your time was not wasted, to say the least, whatever you may have lost in not listening to the sermon. Did you take to the woods the next Sunday because you disliked the church?”

“In part, I suppose, but I always loved the woods and fields, and always felt better after

roaming in them. They seem to have a personality all their own, and to speak to me without affectation or deceit, telling just what they think of me frankly, truthfully, and with a sweet confidence that won me in childhood, and wins me to-day and makes me feel that in them I can ever find faithful friendship."

"Your enjoyment of nature does not come from flattered self-esteem."

"On the contrary, nature never flatters me. She tells me my faults, and I go from her communion with aspirations for a purer and better life—aspirations, however, which have in them no sting, no bitter self-reproaches, only a noble discontent and a strong yearning to be something finer in quality every way than I am."

"Do you see clearly anything except stern, unrelenting law in nature?"

"Yes, sir, I do. I know theologians picture her as cold, unyielding, and merciless, and she is in some of her aspects when she shakes the heavens with lightning and the solid ground with earthquake, and we hear the crash of landslides, and witness the destruction by wind and flood; but the verdant hills and sweet valleys, the varied flowers, the singing birds and laughing waters, and the glad sunshine have each a fellow-feeling for me, which bids me hope. While they tell me to be perfect, they say it so benevolently, so gently, and with so much tender sympathy, that there is implied in it the fact of a path leading to perfection, and that my business is to seek

and find it. In other words, I see the Creator in nature, something more than law, even personality and mercy. It is true, that rock-slide we so narrowly escaped, said pretty plainly, 'Get in the way of my broken law and you shall be crushed;' but that tiny flower growing in the fissure mercifully said, 'Stay here and you will not break that law; stop here and be saved.'"

"My dear brother," I ejaculated in surprise, "I am very glad you look so deeply into nature. You will take hold of the Great Teacher's hand and come out right in the end, I trust."

"With your help, Elbert. I confess I have read her to-day more clearly than before."

"What, then, is the creed of nature, so far as you have read?"

"It lies in four lines of poetry, which I recently quoted to my sister-in-law, Mrs. Light-heart, in reply to some of her unreasoning views of religion, and runs thus:

'Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way;
But to act that each to-morrow
Finds us better than to-day.'

"A very good creed; but how can you live it?—that is the question. I grant you that God in nature beckons you to a higher life, but it is like a man calling you to come ashore when you are struggling in the waves. What you want is a life-boat. To rise out of the surging tides and from the strugglings and buffetings of sin may be

the very thing you are trying to do, and you need something more than a beckon; you need help, and help personal and immediate. Nature is full of the thought and the life of God; but to know His real love, to feel His all-embracing tenderness and helpful, heart-beating sympathy, you must come, I think, to Jesus Christ."

"You may be right, Elbert, but I cannot quite see why Christ is the only way to a helpful knowledge of God. To me there is something more than a beckon in nature. There is inspiration and sympathy, and consequently help. Nature is fresher and more direct from the hand of God than even the Bible; for the latter may have suffered in transcribing from interpolations and changes, while the former comes to me at first-hand—not second-hand."

"My dear Charley, that you see so much in nature is because you read through the revelations of Jesus Christ. Had Christ not come and interpreted God to the world, you would not see in nature what you now see. He having come, you were borne into His views of God, as expressed in His life and words; and, whether you have read the Bible or not, being in literature and in the common speech of the people, and forming a necessary part of your inherited ideas, you cannot look at nature except through the glass of Christianity."

"Reasonable words, Elbert, but look! Is it possible time has rushed so rapidly? The whole western sky is aglow with the bright coloring

of the declining sun ! It has no frown. It is one broad benignant smile divine, full of benediction, and makes one thirst for something of its beauty in his own life."

"Yes, Charley, it should lead us to pray with Moses, the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. Christ revealed that beauty, and through Him it can descend into the human heart."

Perhaps anticipating what I was about to add, he startled me by saying, "I am full, and must digest the large amount of thought-food you have already given me before receiving any more. Mental indigestion is the bane of the world. If people digested what they heard before accepting or rejecting it, there would not be the slow progress, the waste of words, or the irritating nonsense so extensively uttered for solemn truth. Why, there are crowds of so-called Christians, who are only spiritual dyspeptics. They have never mastered, really and fully, one clean, spiritual idea, and, so never assimilating truth, never making it a part of their life, they say one thing and act another, and drive away sensible people by stripping Christianity and its Author of every semblance of reason and even common sense.

"My sister-in-law is one of these, though it would not be a graceful thing to say, were I not sure that you know it already. If I ever accept Christianity, it will not be her Christianity. She would make my brother the rankest infidel, did he not see Christianity sensibly and attractively interpreted in such lives as the Blentwoods.

“ This conflict of hateful and attractive views of Christianity may serve the purpose of making me more careful and sure of my ground in my step-by-step investigation of its claims. However thoughtless I may be in other things, I shall not be thoughtless in accepting or rejecting Christianity.” He extended his hand, and I took it as a pledge of his sincerity and warm friendship.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GHOSTLY RIDE.

WE returned to our landing-place in quiet, each busy with his own thoughts. I could not keep Ethel out of my mind. "Where is she?" I asked myself. "Not in the house at an hour like this. She must be in the maple grove, enjoying this beautiful sunset; or is she under that elm tree, where we sat last together? Is she thinking of me? How much I would give to know! What a dear good girl she is! How devoted to her father! It must take a more transcendent love than I can hope to inspire to win her away from such a father. Would it not be selfish in the best man living to ask her to leave a home where she is so needed and so happy? But she is worth waiting for a thousand years. "Yes," I repeated and this time aloud and with emphasis, "a thousand years!"

"What!" broke out Charley with a comical expression, "are you computing the probable duration of the earth? or some other planet? or are you trying to locate and realize the millennium?"

"Call it the last," I answered a little confused, "and you will come near enough to the truth."

We were now in sight of the landing, and, pointing to something nearly white in close proximity to our dinner-box, Charley asked, "What is that?—a polar bear strayed from a menagerie and robbing us of our food? If it is, I'll capture him if it takes a thousand years," quoting my words, and imitating my voice and gesture. And off he ran with the speed of the wind, and soon had by the tail an animal which proved to be a mule, which he mounted, as it was getting up, declaring that Long-ears should give him a ride as a penalty for coming into our kitchen unbidden.

Assuming the dignity of a lecturer on his white rostrum, he said, "Whether the donkey, or any of his near relations, is the crude result of Nature's feeling after her idea of a horse or not, the mule is certainly peculiar. I put emphasis on peculiar! Note the sanctimonious physiognomy, the deacon-like, lawyer-like, and mother-in-law contour of the brain! He is a born diplomat. You never know what his intentions are. He suppresses his emotions, and carries his point by concealment. His long ears indicate that he hears everything, though you would not believe it by the look of his eye, which says nothing."

After going on in this style of harangue for a few moments, he raised his hat, and, bowing with lordly dignity, concluded by saying:

"And now, friend Elbert, I must commence my evening's ride. Grieve not at my absence,

for I shall soon return with increased knowledge of the country to enhance our happiness in squatter sovereignty, as we gather round the evening meal." Whereupon he began bowing and tapping the mule in a laugh-provoking way. The taps became blows, and still the mule did not stir. He now put on an irresistibly droll expression, which doubled me up in continued outbursts of laughter.

Finally controlling myself, I raised my hat in mock dignity, and said apologetically, "I hope your lordship will not think me rude. I was not laughing at your departure, but rather at the prospect of not being separated from your valuable company, even by a short exploring expedition."

At this, with an indescribable expression of distress, he raised both hands, and exclaimed, with King Richard, "A horse! a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

"Since you are so earnest to depart, perhaps I can assist you," I said, cutting a stick, and presenting it to him with uncovered head and a low bow.

Up to this time the mule had not even winked in recognition of our existence, but with a vigorous application of the stick there began a slow rounding up of the back, rising higher and higher with every blow, till at last from its summit Charley cried out, "This is not a mule; this is a dromedary!"

"It is simply a mule acting in his diplomatic capacity," I said. "He has an idea in his head,

depend upon it, although it expresses itself only in his back ! ”

“ Then diplomacy must be met by diplomacy,” said Charley, applying the sharp end of his stick to the dromedary hump till it slowly descended and became the back of a mule again.

The whiteness of the mule and its rider suggested the idea of a ship, and, tying a long withe to the mule’s tail, and standing off at a safe distance, I vociferated with as much pride of service as possible, “ My lord admiral, the pilot is at the helm, and awaits your orders.”

“ Starboard and port the helm in quick succession,” came back the command from Charley in nautical tone.

I obeyed orders by jerking the tail from left to right, and then from right to left, and Charley, seizing a long ear in each hand, shouted some nautical commands into one, as through a trumpet, pushing the other forward, as if to inflate it for a jib-sail, and then, drumming with all his might against the mule’s sides, and gesticulating with monomaniacal enthusiasm, he almost screamed :

“ In prophetic vision already methinks

“ She starts ; she moves ; she seems to feel
The thrill of life along her keel.”

This was too much for the mule’s equanimity. He dropped all diplomacy, and revealed his mulish spirit by kicking and trying to throw his rider ; and failing in this, he soon disappeared with him behind a clump of firs on a dead run, Charley

waving his hand, as he went out of sight, and shouting back, "Au revoir!"

Though weak with laughter, I managed to run to the point of dissolving view, and saw the run-aways, with unslackened speed, pressing towards a farmyard not far away, the long withe bounding into the air with every leap of the mule, and Charley's white robes fluttering in the wind like a scare-crow eloped from a corn-field. When they reached the fence, the mule stopped so suddenly, Charley had to travel on a few paces beyond, and lit on top of a post, I trembled, fearing he might be hurt, but he raised his hat so politely to some one in the yard, that I concluded, since the fun had not been knocked out of him, he must be unharmed.

"The holy Vargin preserve us," said a voice near me, and an Irish woman, emerged from the grass where she had evidently fallen in a faint; for her dish of berries she had been picking was bottom side up, and she was trembling with fear,

"And did ye see the vision, meester?" she asked in great trepidation.

"What was it?" said I.

"Sure it was a ghost, sir, flying on a white baste, and I could not tell whether from the clouds of hiven, or up from the pit, it came so sudden loike; and before I knew it my sinses left me, and the vision was gone."

"What you saw," I said, "was my friend riding a white mule."

"A mule! was it?" she exclaimed in evident

disgust. "Ah! bad luck to ye. It was the angel of death come to warn us of the eend of the world."

Seeing Charley coming, I said, "Well, perhaps the ghost will be here to speak for himself. In the meantime let me help you pick up your berries."

It was a slow process, but the task was finally accomplished, and the berries all replaced in the tin dish apparently as good as before.

"Would you like to sell these berries?" I asked.

"Indade I would," she replied.

Taking a paper from my pocket, I emptied her dish, and returned it with a quarter in it.

"You are very ginerous," she said as she saw the coin. "May the mither of God bless ye."

"Mother of God!" broke in Charley, who had just come up in season to overhear these words.

"Has God a mother?"

"Ter be sure."

"I hope she was a fine woman."

"Indade, she was that," answered the berry woman eying him doubtfully.

"I am glad to know God comes from a good family," said Charley with a queer facial expression; "but why not ask God Himself to bless my friend here?"

"It is all the same, indade, sir. The holy mither has more influence than a poor woman like meself. Indade, indade she has, Ah! yes, indade, ter be sure. The holy saints preserve us!"

With these words she went off, evidently glad to get away from such a heretic to the Romish faith.

"Why is it," asked Charley, as we started for the landing, "that Roman Catholics worship the Virgin Mary?"

"It arose originally in part, I presume, from a failure to see mother-heart, or motherhood, as well as fatherhood in God, and the craving for a divine womanly nature. It is strange they cannot see that Jesus, who reveals the Father, is a complete Being, exhibiting in perfection the highest traits of both man and woman; for where can you find female tenderness and sympathy so beautifully illustrated as in the life of Christ?"

"There you are again full of the seeds of thought!" exclaimed Charley. "I must think this all out some time, but not now. My head aches from the large overdoses you have given it; but supper and a little more fun will bring me all right. Food and fun, like the Siamese twins, should not be separated. When one of those twins died, the death of the other followed; and it is just as true that when fun dies the stomach dies. Fun is just as necessary for good digestion as fresh air is for the lungs."

"Well," said I, as we reached our lunch-box and opened it, "here is food. Mix it with gratitude, and as much judicious fun as seemeth to thee good, and let thy heart rejoice in the Giver to thee of so much super-abounding health and happy good-nature; and, if thou hast a little more

fun than thou needest for thine own digestion, spill a little over for thy less fortunate comrade."

"Amen!" responded Charley seriously accepting my words as sufficient grace before meat, and, taking up a chicken-bone, remarked, "I suppose Christianity, as interpreted by you and the Blentwoods, requires that I pass you the breast meat and retain the wing for myself; but as there is some doubt about the keeping, I think we better make sure of the best first, and if anything spoils, let it be the wing."

"You are right, Charley, and, furthermore, I forego all parts of the chicken to-night, since farinaceous suppers, unless I am to sit up late, are best for me,—most conducive to sleep. So eat breast meat, my brother, eat all the breast meat."

"You are as generous, Elbert, as a duck might be in refusing an umbrella."

"Just about, Charley; and I am glad you have no need to coddle yourself, or restrain your appetite. You are a perfect rhythm of bone and muscle and tissue and nerve, and when food, at any time of day, gets into your stomach, it sets in motion the whole symphonic machinery from your crown to your toes, till digestion is completed and its results appropriated."

"My digestion is good, I admit, but I fear it would not last long, if I moped." Do you not regard laughing as a Christian duty?"

"Yes, Charley, I do; and if I saw nothing to laugh at, I would laugh occasionally anyway, mechanically, until I could laugh heartily. It is

a historical fact long ago supported by Quackenbos and others, that one can put himself into almost any mood by putting on the externals of that mood. Actors do this. To feel blue, draw down the muscles of the face, and put on a woe-begone look. On the other hand, smile, look bright and cheerful, and you will soon feel so."

"Suppose we test your theory," said Charley, as he took the last mouthful, "and, so, send my big supper on its beneficent mission rejoicing?" Suiting the action to the word, he threw back his head, and exploded with a loud, "Ha, ha, ha!" I joined in, and very soon we were both laughing because we had to, and as heartily, as if we had started with something to excite our risibles.

"There!" I said, as soon as the paroxysm was over, "the theory is proved, and we must repeat this after each meal."

"Some such practice as that," said Charley, "would brighten up many a dining-room, and be better than medicine for feeble stomachs."

Our next business was to erect our tent, and place in it as soft a bed of boughs as we could make, first scorching them in a fire made for the purpose. During this process, which consumed considerable time, Charley entertained me with the following description of the *finale* of his ride:

"The mule stopped so suddenly at the farm-yard bars, I found it convenient to pass on a few feet, not wishing the mule's company any longer, and so slid over the animal's head, and alighted on

some blankets, hanging over a post, as neatly and easily as if placed there by a fairy. A man in the yard looked up half-scared to death, as if he expected every minute would be—the next! I raised my hat, and putting on all the urbanity at my command, I said, ‘Good evening, neighbor.’ Finding I was no apparition, but real flesh and blood, though clothed in white linen, he at length broke out, ‘Neighbor! Who in the devil are you anyway?’

“I replied, ‘Friend, you make a slight mistake; I am not in the devil.’

“‘Well,’ he essayed again, ‘where in the devil did you come from?’”

“‘You still mistake me,’ I said, ‘I did not come in the devil, I came on a mule, this one,’ pointing to the panting beast standing at the bars quite subdued and docile. ‘I had a very fine ride; and as this animal is probably your property, I am very much obliged to you, sir, and will make any pecuniary compensation you desire.’

“‘The devil, you will,’ said he, his muscles beginning to relax and twitch about the mouth.

“‘Friend,’ said I, ‘I insist that the devil and I have no business relations whatever.’

“‘Don’t eh?’ he asked, beginning to shake. ‘That’s good. He, he, he! No business with the devil, eh? Guess you don’t do business round here, then,—he, he, he! Most of folks round here takes him in partner, and the devil runs pretty much the whole concern. But ye don’t

say, do ye, stranger, that ye rode that devil—I mean that vicious mule without bridle or saddle?’

“‘Certainly,’ I answered.

He began to slap his knees in ecstasy. ‘That’s too good for anything. He, he, he! ho, ho, ho—oh! That’s worth big money to me, stranger. Why, that mule is the terror of the neighborhood, and I couldn’t sell it for a song; but if you have rode it bareback and without reins, Jehosephat! that’ll bring it into market, don’t ye see? I’m obliged to ye, stranger, though when I first saw ye, I thought ye’d come from that warm country where they have to wear summer clothes the year round! Let me git ye a glass of cider.’

I excused myself, and came away; and the last I heard from him was the raucous sound of ‘He, he, he! ho, ho, ho—oh!’”

Having finished our task, I began to read silently from my New Testament, when, to my relief, Charley asked that I read aloud, which I did, and after gratefully commending ourselves and others to the watchful care of the Supreme Ruler, we lay down on our fresh-made bed, and slept soundly.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BRISK MORNING SAIL

WHEN we awoke, the tops of the trees, lit up by the rising sun, were smiling down upon us a seeming benediction for the day. The rays of light, as they crept towards us, played hide and seek with the moving foliage, now skulking behind the leaves, and now darting at us long shafts of bright light, till, at length, the shadows all fled away, and the whole landscape seemed to wake up, and become conscious that it was day.

We ate our breakfast with a good appetite, folded our tent, put all our luggage into our boat, and in reluctance to leave a spot now become a part of life's pleasing associations, we reclined for a while on our primitive bed delectable with the fragrance of balsam and pine. We lay so quiet, a bird came picking crumbs close to our feet, and then wiped its bill, and preened its feathers in glad satiety. A squirrel followed, its tail actually brushing Charley's boot, and, after getting its fill, scampered away with many antics. At a little distance a rabbit was seen making short detours, approaching in zig-zag lines, and taking observa-

tions at every turn. It would raise its head slowly and very cautiously, and then stand on its hind legs for several moments without a motion, except in the erect ears, which seemed almost to quiver in the eagerness of listening, and then, coming a little nearer, repeat its observations and listening attitudes.

"There is a meat dinner for us," whispered Charley passing me a pistol he had brought with him for game, which I took, and slowly covered the breast of the little fellow, as it was again exposed to view, but did not fire. I was so interested in the creature's movements, especially its extreme precaution against danger, proving thereby its love of life, I concluded that I did not want to eat it, and silently passed the pistol back to Charley, who as silently raised it in position; and when the cunning little creature exposed its head again, I feared to see it drop, but Charley laid down his pistol, saying, "I think I'll take fish for dinner!" We both laughed, and, the spell being broken, there was no further advance in sociability on the part of our dumb companions.

Taking long sniffs of the balsamic air, I said, as we rose up, "We may not have so soft and healthful a bed to-night, unless we take it along with us."

"We'll trust in Providence, Elbert."

"Ah! Charley, Providence does not encourage any slackening in the exercise of forethought. There is a great deal of educating power in being called upon, as we are in this world, to look fore

and aft. It would be an unkind Providence to relieve us from the necessity of thinking."

"Did not Jesus say, 'Take no thought for to-morrow'?"

"No, that is the language of King James' translation of what he said. His words in Greek, in which they were recorded, contain the idea of anxiety, and a better rendering is, 'Be not anxious for the morrow, etc.'"

"When, then, may one expect Providential help?"

"When he has exhausted his utmost resources, and can do nothing more, he can then look up with implicit confidence for Divine aid."

"Well, I likes de horn you blow, brudder, as Tom said to Dr. Blentwood, when he first heard him preach, and if you say so, I'll tote the whole bed aboard in a jiffy."

"Remember, Charley, I have no anxiety in the matter; indeed, I am somewhat in the condition of the hypothetical donkey, which the medieval metaphysicians said, if placed exactly half way between two bundles of hay, would not, between the two equal motives, go to either bundle, but remain in his tracks till starvation relieved him of all perplexity."

"Ah!" Charley exclaimed, the fun beginning to bubble up through his eyes, "those much-abused and nobly employed hair-splitters were right. Behold yesterday's mule! Was it not held fast in its tracks by two opposing motives? Where would have been my ride, had we not

added a preponderance of motive in my favor? The very moment he had a little more motive for yielding to our will than to have his own, he scooted, and streaked it for home, bearing me with him, flying over the fields in gleesome, blood-dancing exhilaration."

Here he branched off into an eulogium on metaphysics, waxing more and more grandiloquent, until, pretending to be overcome by his eloquence, I threw up my arms, falling back on the boughs, staring at him with mouth wide open, when he began to congratulate himself on this demonstration of his power to sway an audience. Halting, his countenance at the same time falling into the most lugubrious expression, he continued:

"But alas! my joy is touched with sadness as I reflect, that I must leave my friend here as a footstool for the ever-watchful partridge to drum on, and the cunning squirrel to peal his beechnuts on, the crow to peck at, and, indeed, for the whole animal creation to prey upon! Were he the metaphysicians' donkey, I would not mind; for I am not much on donkeys; but it overcomes me to lose my friend, whose majestic dome of thought, whose beetling brow, and whose eagle eye plainly indicate how he could startle the world with the brilliant movement of his mental artillery, lighting up the very heavens with the flash of his lightning-like thought, and shaking the earth itself with the ponderosity of his intellectual cannonading."

Pausing to take breath, and looking at me pathetically, he suddenly changed aspect, and, clapping his hands, ejaculated, "A salvation thought occurs to me. I am a third power, and may break up this equilibrium of forces," and, so saying, he pulled the boughs from under me, and carried them off to the boat, placing them in the bow so carefully as to make an attractive couch to recline on. He came back with sparkling eyes, prophetic of a frolic, and, putting himself into fantastic shapes, exclaimed:

"You still linger, O great philosopher! I perceive by the molecular motions in your orbs of light that you are now up to mischief!"

"No, not mischief, but *bonchief*," I replied, and, holding up one remaining bough, added, "Here is the only link left in the motive force which would chain me to this spot."

He tried to get it, and, failing, picked me up, and tugged me to the bed of boughs in the boat amid much hilarious mirth, which is the best antidote to the blues, hypochondria, dyspepsia, and kindred diseases, as well as the best restorative yet discovered for jaded nerves.

A brisk wind was blowing directly astern, and we hoisted sail merely for the sensation of riding fast, and not that we cared to get along; for we had no object in view except to obtain the most change and recreation possible, and were ready to abandon the river any moment it became monotonous.

"What is the best method of spending a vacation?" Charley asked, as we began to get under way.

"With Charley Lightheart," I answered emphatically.

"I call for a philosophical answer, and put the emphasis on *method*," he insisted.

"My answer was philosophical so far as it went," I replied, "but to go a step farther, it should be spent as free as the air, which has periods of great energy and periods of absolute quiet. Those of soft muscles, especially, should imitate the air at rest, and become magnificent loafers like me, for example, stretched out at full length on this sweet-smelling couch, making no more exertion than what is necessary to breathe, and feeling little or no more weight of care than an infant. And now, if you please, we will hear your opinion."

"My opinion," said he, bending backward and running his thumbs, with fingers spread wide apart, up and down the armholes of his vest in a ludicrously pompous manner, "my opinion is that a man should spend his vacation as he chooses, provided he chooses to spend it right."

"A very safe remark, Charley."

"Yes, dear Elbert, safety is my strong point. There is nothing like being safe. When my father caught me tying a tin pail to a young cow's tail, I illustrated my genius for safety by saying, 'Father, I am some afraid this will frighten the heifer, and I guess I won't do it.' Safety, you

see, was my controlling motive even at that early period."

"Was it safety for the heifer, or for you?" I interjected.

He looked at me in well-feigned bewilderment. "How could I be as well versed in the safety of cows as in my own? Self-preservation is the first law of nature. I knew that my pantaloons were thin, and my flesh tender, and that I could not bear pain very well, and to fortify my position with safe breastworks was a wise discretion, which, we are told, is the better part of valor. I was going to give you other strategic movements for safety in my early life, but I fear you do not appreciate this beautiful trait in my character!"

"Oh, yes I do," I replied. "To keep on the safe side of the road always, and not run the risk of trying how near you can come to the precipice and not topple over; to keep on the safe side of temperance by never running the risk of taking the first glass of intoxicating liquor; to keep on the safe side of virtue by never trying to see how far you can come to doing wrong, and not doing it; to keep on the safe side of honesty by never borrowing so much as a penny from a trust fund, or employer unconsulted; to keep on the safe side of truth by never entertaining as a guest the slightest approach to falsehood;—these and other pursuits of safety cannot be too highly commended."

"Amen! in my end of the boat," said Charley in approval; "but don't you think a more

worldly pursuit of safety desirable, if secured by pure strategy? Mark, I say pure strategy with no moral obliquity."

"I highly commend the strategy by which you escaped a whipping."

"That is all I can ask of a man, who is such a stickler for small points of equity. I cannot expect you to approve of my tying the pail to the cow's tail; you would sympathize with the cow, and not with my boyish love of fun!"

"I should keenly sympathize with your fun-loving nature, Charley, but my sense of justice and fair play would not allow me to enjoy fun created for one party by the suffering of another, except, it may be, in the line of duty. I am a great lover of innocent sport in boy or man, and hope I shall always be."

"Was I right in attaching the pail?" Charley asked, jumping up, and raising his arm with a most energetic gesture. "That is what I want to know, uncovered of rhetoric, and in plain English."

"Not if it would have frightened and injured the cow," I made answer, as soon as my laughter would permit.

"Now I have got you!" said he, still more eloquent of gesture, and looking down on me with a droll mixture of haughty pride and benevolence. He paused a moment to enjoy his advantage, and to give weight to his words, and then, with both arms sawing the air, he asked, almost in a scream, "Was it right to attach a

withe to a mule's tail, and treat it as if it were the helm of a senseless ship? Tell me that!"

"That is a very different matter," I answered, as soon as I could speak, holding my sides. "The cow is useful only in giving milk, and, to that end, needs to be kept very quiet; but the mule is only useful in going, and he would not go, from pure stubbornness; and so we took the least painful, and, at the same time, the most enjoyable, method of conquering his rebellious spirit, and making him of some worth in the world. This is a case, Charley, where duty and fun kissed each other."

He threw down his hat, and sat down, saying, "It is no use to exhaust myself in eloquence; you will not see through even an old boy's eyes. The most sublime oratory, I perceive, has its limit!"

"That reminds me to ask, 'What profession, or occupation, do you intend to follow?'"

"I don't know," he answered, a little more seriously. "I am somewhat in the condition of your hypothetical donkey; several callings in life draw me about equally, and I cannot decide. I hope I shall learn what I am fitted for in season to be prepared for it."

"Glad the question of self-ease does not come in to bother you."

"Perhaps it does though. Should not one choose that profession which he would enjoy the best?"

"He will be most likely to succeed, if in love with his work"

"Is not happiness a legitimate object of pursuit in life?"

"Not according to the higher law."

"What! isn't it right to be happy?"

"Certainly, and desirable, too, though it is better to be happy in being right."

"Why not seek happiness?"

"Because it is an unworthy object, as an end in itself, and to live for it is the surest way not to reach it, at least in highest measure."

"Make that clear to me, Elbert, and I'll give you half a dollar."

"Well, to begin at the first parallel, is there anything noble in self-seeking?"

"Probably not; but is there anything noble in seeking misery?"

"Certainly not. To seek happiness or misery, as an end, is a kind of selfishness, and has no merit in it. To be worthily heroic we must go out of self, and the farther we leave self behind the grander we are. As Emerson says:

'The hero is not fed on sweets,
Daily his own heart he eats.'

"Self or service is the question before every man, and on his choice pivots both character and destiny; yes, and the truest happiness also."

"But can I not serve others and my own happiness too?"

"Real service may lead directly in the line of self-sacrifice and personal discomfort, not to say hardship and suffering. There can be no noble

daring for truth and the right, where personal happiness must be consulted at every step. Whoever in the struggle of existence thinks first of his own happiness is out of place in life; for there is no true work for him to do. On the other hand, he who aims at noble service may find joy even in self-sacrifice."

"But, Elbert, I do not see why I cannot find happiness by seeking it."

"Well, Charley, it is simply a matter of fact that happiness is a coy maiden that will not be caught that way. To win substantial happiness you must forget self in your unselfish devotion to others' welfare, or to some good and worthy cause; and then, indeed, it may come in all its richness, a thousand-fold more desirable than that enjoyed by the mere pleasure-seeker. The highest happiness comes to us obliquely and incidentally, and not when sought directly."

"But, Elbert, doesn't a man wholly seek his own happiness when he marries?"

"He is liable not to find it if he does. Many a couple find the bonds of wedlock grievous, because in marrying each expected to be made happy by the other. On the contrary, if a man marries with the hope of giving happiness to the woman he loves by his unselfish devotion, he is not only likely to succeed, but to receive in addition the happiness which comes unsought; and the woman who marries to be happy rather than to dispense happiness, as wife and mistress of a home, by working for the good of others, will, in

all probability, fail, because her love is selfish and downward, craving everything, and not genuine love, which prefers to give everything."

A long-drawn sigh came from Charley, who presently said, "You have pretty high ideals, Elbert. I fear you breathe fairer air than I do, and feed on invisible substances, and that incipient wings are already emerging from your shoulder-blades."

"Oh! no, Charley, I am wholly mundane in body, and too much so in mind. I wish I had more wings within."

"Don't go too fast, Elbert, and leave me so far behind as to take away my courage, for I am really striving to come up to you, and have a great deal to think over and incorporate into my moral corporosity."

"In some respects, at least, you leave *me* behind, Charley."

"In what, pray?"

"In a certain natural gift you have, and the disposition to use it, of making people forget themselves. It is a grand power, Charley, one which will make you a welcome guest everywhere, and a needed presence in the sick-room. To you and Ethel I owe a large share of my speedy recovery and continued improvement. You both have the same power in effect, though dissimilar in operation. Yours is more like nature in her varied, frolicsome moods; hers like the steady, gentle rays of the sun, scattering the dews of unwelcome thoughts and drawing all

the richer life to the surface. What E. R. Champlin said of another might be expressly said of Ethel, and the last two lines apply to you as well; and how much brighter the world would be were there more Ethel Blentwoods and Charley Lighthearts in it:

'She took her lesson from the sun—
That gave her wealth ere she beheld it—
And gave a smile to every one,
And, if she saw a cloud, dispelled it.'

During all this conversation we were not unmindful of the panoramic views along shore, which, however, we enjoyed mostly in silence, only occasionally interjecting a remark parenthetically to call attention to some particular feature. The wind was now blowing with increasing force, and our little craft sped on at a rapid rate, throwing up an occasional spray, which we had to dodge or get wet. This furnished us with considerable pastime.

"There!" Charley would remark as he failed to escape a spirt of water, "my starboard eye is drowned;" and, perhaps, before he had that wiped dry, he would cry out, "My port ear has shipped a cargo of liquid!" and so on, using sailor terms only to describe his condition.

At length, the fun beginning to wane, I asked, "Isn't this getting a little monotonous, Charley?"

"Yes," he replied, "I think I don't like a

douche-bath in spots any more. Suppose we drop sail?"

"That will suit me exactly," I said, but had scarcely finished before the wind lulled, and then died quickly away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DINNER WITH DELIGHTFUL STRANGERS.

THE ruffled face of the river smoothed down all its wrinkles, and looked as innocent as if it had never known anything but eternal calm. The now almost vertical sun poured out his hot rays upon us, until we were glad to dip our hands in the water to cool our pulses. Not a tree moved, and the river's surface, like a flawless mirror, reflected everything in matchless perfection. The sky beneath was an exact counterpart of that above us, and we seemed in the centre of a hollow sphere, with no visible support to hold us up. Occasionally, it is true, this liquid reflector would be slightly disturbed by a fish lazily swimming to the surface for a fly, and then as lazily sinking down again, as if the morsel did not pay for the exertion.

No one could feel energetic in such an atmosphere; and if we had any thoughts we kept them to ourselves. It was a time for day-dreams, and we gave ourselves up to pleasant reverie.

At length I asked Charley if he was in the body; and, rubbing his forehead, he answered

slowly, "I was out somewhere, but am all here now. Any news?"

Looking at my watch, I answered, "It is one o'clock!"

"Factorum!" he exclaimed in surprise. "I thought I was hungry, and now I know it. Where shall we dine—on shore? or on ship-board?"

"There," said I, pointing to a tree on the right bank with a grassy slope, "is an attractive spot; let us go there for a change, and dine more like monarchs of all we survey."

We had not reached the shore before a gay party, about ten in number, appeared under that very tree with lunch-baskets, and saluted us with the waving of handkerchiefs. We returned the salute, and, having landed and secured our boat, we marched boldly up to our proposed dining-place, lunch-box in hand. We took off our hats, and Charley, being a little in advance, thus addressed them:—

"Ladies and gentlemen, we seem to demonstrate the truth of the saying, that great minds agree, in our selection of this pretty spot as a desirable place to dine; and the fact, that we choose it is a proof that we are in love with delightful things, and, therefore, must be in love with each other, as kindred spirits; though this latter fact may not yet have come up into consciousness, because we imagine we have not had that experience which small minds call getting acquainted. What does it signify that we may not have met

before outwardly, when inwardly we touch one another in all those superior qualities, which make acquaintance worth having and friendship abiding? Great minds, like ours, know each other intuitively, and at once, without the preliminary necessity of being put into quarantine for fear some latent poison may be developed. It is as plain as the sunshine that we are all very congenial, and very delightful people, and, therefore, should consider ourselves as the oldest and best of friends.

"Besides, we have met by providential appointment, which is another argument that we know each other, and should feel thoroughly at home. Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Charley, and this is my excellent friend, Elbert, in search of recreation and health. We both felt a double yearning for this attractive place, and now we know why. It was because you, our old, valued, and long-separated friends, were here to greet us. I congratulate you and ourselves on this happy meeting. We are dying to take all of you by the hand, as, of course, you are dying to take us by the hand, and, therefore, I will waste no more time in words."

This unique speech was greeted during its delivery, and at its close, with abundant smiles, laughter, and clapping of hands. There was a slight pause, when one of their number stepped forward in reply:

"Gentlemen, Charley and Elbert, your admirable speech finds a responsive echo in all our

hearts. Your argument is most convincing that we are old and true friends. We will be your brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts (pointing to a young lady, which, having some special application, produced a laugh). It gives us unspeakable pleasure to meet you after so long a separation. My name is John."

"How do you do, John?" said Charley, and they both shook hands cordially. Then John and I shook hands as old friends. After that each one was introduced by his or her Christian name, and the handshaking, from first to last, was more or less demonstrative according to disposition, and the ability of each to meet the demands of the occasion.

There was a good deal of laughter during the process, and an evident desire on the part of each to throw off all needless reserve, and we at once felt at home with them. Charley's spirit was so thoroughly caught that there was no place for an apology.

The ladies spread tablecloths, and covered them with the contents of their baskets, and we added those of our box, which, in the line of frosted cakes, tarts, turnovers, and meat pies, made a good showing. There was an abundance of everything, and we all ate as heartily, and with as much freedom from anything like stiffness, as if we had always known each other. The ladies were profuse in their compliments of our cake, and we as truthfully, as well as gallantly, praised the choice things they passed to us.

"We are exceedingly glad you came," said an intelligent, and pretty-voiced lady to me, after dinner, as we stood a little apart from the rest. "I assure you we have had a much better time than we otherwise could have had. You and your friend have given zest to the occasion. It does not seem possible we were strangers only two hours ago."

"I suppose we owe our rapid acquaintance in part," I replied, "to the skilful speech and captivating manner of my friend Charley, but more, I think, to the delightful congeniality and intelligent good sense of your party."

"That was, indeed, a phenomenal speech, and so remarkably winning in its delivery that it broke down all barriers, and we were ready to capitulate even before he got half through. He must be a delightful companion. There is much truth in what he said about kindred spirits."

"Undoubtedly such need only the slightest contact to awaken knowledge and friendship. Indeed, kindred minds are the only ones, who ever really know each other. Between opaque and unrelated minds there will always be more or less ignorance of each other, and consequent misunderstandings, though they may live under the same roof forever."

"How far do you think all trouble between friends may be referable to want of knowledge?"

"It would be difficult to say, owing to different moral states and dispositions; but this much I think is true, that two persons cannot know

each other truly, until all misunderstandings cease."

"Is such knowledge possible in this world?"

"It certainly cannot exist without love as an interpreter. Where we cannot love, we cannot see and cannot know. Even the beauties of nature and art must be loved before they can be really seen and felt. To illustrate more fully what I mean, take that quality of self-denial, or self-sacrifice, which characterizes a true Christian; can a selfish person see it, understand it, and appreciate it at its full value?"

"Only so far as it pleased and benefited himself."

"Precisely, and even then he would take it chiefly as his due, and that others, who failed to do as much, defrauded him to that extent. Again, a man who stands up for the right against his own interest, and, incidentally perhaps, that of some others, will necessarily be misunderstood by all who lack his true sympathy, moral courage and sound integrity."

"I could never have interpreted my own sentiments so admirably as you have done, Mr. Elbert," she said, smiling at the handle she attached to my Christian name. "You make me feel more keenly than ever the hungerings and cravings I have long felt for intellectual associations. I hope you will excuse the frankness which leads me to express a simple matter of fact."

"Oh, certainly!" I said, a little embarrassed, "I will be equally frank, and say that I greatly

enjoy meeting a lady of your cast of mind, who can talk upon subjects other than gossip and the latest style of bonnet, and can stimulate thought in others, as well as think herself. There are so many who never acquire, and never strive to acquire, any taste for profound study, and who never inform themselves on any of the great questions of the day, or, and more especially, on any of the deeper problems of human life, that it is a treat to find delightful exceptions."

She thanked me, and said, "I have books at my command, and an intelligent brother, who, however, is away a large part of the time, and intelligent friends, of course; but what I most need is to have some one, or ones, with whom to talk up more frequently the suggestions, which come to me from reading and experience."

"That is certainly helpful and satisfactory to us all."

"Yes, and what is peculiar is the fact, in my case, at least, that it is only the very few who can tell us just what we want to know," and then with a little blush, she added, "I should be pleased to exchange full names and addresses, if agreeable to you, with the hope that we may meet again."

"With pleasure," I responded, finding a blank card in my diary, on which I wrote, and handed her.

"Elbert Bloomfield!" she read aloud in surprise, as she handed me her card. "Why, did you not speak, last Spring, on Salvation and Character, in Springfield?"

"I did."

"Well, I thought I must have met you somewhere, but could not place you. My brother Thede and I heard you, and that one address of yours saved him from going wholly over to infidelity, and cleared up so many difficulties that were troubling my mind also. We never before got such a reasonable and common-sense view of what is meant, or should be meant, by Christian salvation. You made it something real and tangible, and something no intelligent mind could carelessly lay aside, or fail to make a subject of profound study. My brother would be delighted to see you. Cannot you and your friend dine with us to-morrow? It will be hardly out of your way, as we live down the river, and not far from the shore. I suppose you will stop at ——?"

"We intend to."

"Well, ours is the first large, square, and somewhat old-fashioned house on the hill beyond, and you will know it by the clump of trees on its northern side provided with hammocks and patent swings. I can assure you nothing would please brother Thede better than a talk with you. I hope you can come."

At this moment Charley came up, and she repeated her invitation, which he at once accepted, supposing I had done the same. I had, practically, but added, "It will certainly be a very pleasant change for us, and we are exceedingly obliged to you."

"Then we shall expect you," she said, as we took our leave.

I bowed, and Charley said, "Nothing less than a cannon-ball will prevent us."

Raising our hats, we bade the company adieu and started for the boat.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO JOLLY FELLOWS IN A BOAT.

WE were ready to push off, when two young ladies came rushing down the bank, and one of them, whom Charley introduced as Carrie Horton, exclaimed, "We shall miss you awfully," a remark meant for Charley.

"I hope we shall not be long separated," Charley replied: "for I shall simply exist till we meet again."

"Oh, you'll forget us," said Carrie Horton, "as soon as you are out of sight."

"Forget!" ejaculated Charley with a sigh of distress. "Can a wounded eagle forget the dart that pierced its flesh?"

The girls giggled. "You don't look much wounded," remarked Miss Horton's companion.

"Ah!" Charley replied, placing his hand over his heart, "how much, then, my looks belie me! for my wound is deep, and can never be healed except by the sweet, soothing, mollifying salve of—I leave you to supply what my timid tongue dares not utter."

The girls giggled again, and, as we pushed off from the shore, I thought I detected Miss Horton

throwing a kiss at Charley, and his movements bore out the idea ; for he opened his mouth as if to catch something, and then swallowed with every manifestation of delight, patting his throat and stomach as if it tasted good all the way down. His acts and facial expression were so comical I could not help shaking with pent-up laughter, though I managed to work hard at the oars, and we were soon out in full view of the party on the bluff, who saluted us handsomely, and then sung "Should old acquaintance be forgot." We lifted our hats, and waved them in acknowledgment till they were hid from our view. I then broke the silence with hearty and continuous laughter.

"Where are you hurt?" Charley asked, looking up with a face of solemn aspect and feigned alarm.

"What outrageous thing are you going to do next, Charley?"

"Outrageous? Don't use such strong, Biblical terms—I mean Eastern-country terms, where the Bible was writ."

"You are a brick!" I said, falling into a college expression, with which I knew him to be familiar.

"A brick," he retorted, "is a parallelogram; I am not a parallelogram, and therefore not a brick, though of clay and burnt—by the sun." Rising, and striking an attitude, he continued, "Behold these graceful proportions, and this exalted mien, and then belittle my mighty aspect by calling me a brick!"

He sat down with the air of one who had annihilated his opponent.

"Charley Lightheart, you paralogize."

"No, Elbert Bloomfield, I syllogize; but I will condescend to hear you state the paralogism, though it hurts my dignity to have my great reasoning faculties called in question."

"Well, because you are not a parallelogram, you draw an unwarrantable conclusion."

"Listen then," said he, counting his fingers; "a brick is hard, and coarse, and stiff, and rough, and insensible, sharp-cornered, unchangeable, and generally red in color; whereas I am soft, and limber, and fine, and smooth, and sensitive, round, changeable, and generally pinkish in color, when not wrought up to the white heat of indignation by your obfuscations of my sparkling, intellectual ratiocinations. Listen again, I am conscious; a brick is not conscious; therefore I am not a brick. Is there any paralogism about that? Is it not a perfect syllogism? Have I not touched the nadir depths of logical profundity? Let the contents of your cranium be still. Silence is golden at an hour like this!"

Of course, there was nothing to do but laugh; for the soberest Jew, even a weeping, wailing Jeremiah, could not look upon Charley Lightheart in his droll moods without convulsive laughter. Charley saw the grotesque side of everything, and no one enjoyed a laugh better than he, especially after getting me to laughing, because, I suspect, he was under orders from both Dr. Lightheart

and himself to keep me in good spirits. At any rate, we laughed much on this vacation trip and always felt the better for it. Better than medicine, clarifying the brain, it made me more in love with nature and nature's God.

"Charley," I said, as soon as there was sufficient calm, "you have a mission."

"State it, my Lord Elbert."

"It is to take out overtaxed brain-workers and convalescents on easy excursions, and cure them by making them forget themselves. Do you know I have a theory, that the salvation of the body may, in part, hinge on the same principle as the salvation of the soul, at least, in one important consideration. In either case self must be buried out of sight. We find our higher selves by losing our lower selves. If we seek Christ, and think only of ourselves, we shall not find Him; and so, if we walk, or ride, or exercise, and continually think, This is for my health, we shall not find the health we seek. What we want, for health of body or mind, is to get out of self, and stay out, and live in the glad sunshine, the fresh air, the songs of birds, the beauties of nature, the thought of God, and the welfare of man."

"I am afraid," said Charley, "I should not always find so appreciative an invalid as you are. Many people, you know, receive our best efforts to cheer them with about as much response as the mud receives the pebble."

"Too true, Charley, but there are enough of the other kind, who, I believe, are actually dying,

not from any cause recognizable by medical science, but because they are living in the sultry atmosphere of self-consciousness breathed over and over, till it has become poisoned and suffocating, and they need some one like you to drag them out of it."

"What if they prefer their lethargic air to the free breath of heaven?"

"Well, if anybody can send into their miasmatic world a shaft of social lightning to drive them out, where God's free winds can blow upon them, and fill their lungs with healthful, life-giving oxygen, that person is yourself."

"You overestimate my ability, friend Elbert; besides, I am a very retiring, shrinking, timid young man."

"It looks so by the way you met and spoke to a whole company of ladies and gentlemen you never saw before, this very day noon."

"That was a case of necessity, where, like the children of Israel at the Red Sea, I must go forward or perish. I might have slunk away like a fool, and thereby revealed just what I was, but I resolved to put the best polish on the fool I could, and so waded in, as the phrase goes, though with palpitating heart and smiting knees."

"Well, I don't see but you got through your Red Sea as triumphantly as the Israelites did through theirs."

"Not quite, I think; my knees are rather sore, and my heart may be wounded just a little."

"Who could have wounded you?"

"Oh! there were so many pretty girls, I felt the prick of Cupid's darts in several quarters. Perhaps Miss Horton wounded me deepest. I got the most acquainted with her. She is in for a good time, and isn't afraid to push for it. She is good style too. How were you struck with her, Elbert?"

"Oh, not specially."

"Bah! you want a woman to be a theologian."

"No, Charley, what I want to find in a woman is some depth of mind, and great depth and steadiness of heart, and, having these, she may boil over with fun, the more the better."

"Isn't Miss Horton all that?"

"She seemed rather shallow, though bright, what there was of her, and fairly quick-witted."

"Well, she skims the surface pretty lively, and perhaps, after all, gets most of the cream of things."

"There is something in that, perhaps, but I like to see a love for the solid, and a disposition to look into the heart of things, together with some moral purpose in life. A shallow-brained and shallow-hearted girl is no fit companion for an intelligent fellow like you. In the hour of trial and in times of small disturbances and petty disappointments, instead of helping you by uncomplaining cheerfulness, she would add to your burdens by her peevish fretfulness. Without brains or heart enough for self-control, unconsciously to herself, perhaps, she would be more thoughtful for her cat than for you. But this in

general as a warning, and not that I read it in Carrie Horton."

"I thank thee for that saving sentence. Really, now, don't you think her chatty and pleasant?"

"Apparently, yes. She could assent to what you said very prettily, but seemed to have few ideas of her own beyond dress and gossip."

"You must have observed her very closely."

"Oh, no! only what I was forced to by her making herself somewhat conspicuous at one time, while I was conversing with Miss — Oh! I have her card; here it is, and her name is Theodocia Willmette Thornton. She called her brother Thede, short for Theodore, I suppose. Their parents, who, she told me, are dead, must have had a taste for alliteration, though Willmette would seem to militate against that theory. It was an afterthought probably, put in on account of its originality and prettiness. She doubtless is known by the name of Theo."

"She seemed a trifle too serious," said Charley, "but whether appropriately named or not, she was mighty good to invite us to dine to-morrow. I expect a fine spread, and you know my heart is very tender towards the author of fine spreads. I almost love her already in anticipation of the good, square meal she will set before us."

"You are of the earth earthy, Charley."

"No, I am firmly planted on the earth, that's all. Jacob's ladder, I believe, rested on the earth."

"Yes, but its top reached to heaven."

"Well, I may top out there sometime, but I'd like to frisk around the base awhile first."

"The longer you stay at the base of the ladder, the harder it will be to climb. The spiritual limbs get stiffened and fixed in a measure by non-use."

"Perhaps so, but I have an idea that, after having a full experience of what there is in this world, I can start on more understandingly towards the spiritual world."

"That seems to be the common idea, or inclination, but it is wrong. To say nothing of the waste of time in chasing after mere worldly pleasures, which like, soap-bubbles, look beautiful in the sunlight of anticipation, but when realized leave, in the hand that grasps them, only a cold, damp spot of disappointment; to say nothing of the formation of habits hard to break; to say nothing of the weakening of the will from self-indulgence in its power to turn toward the better way, you need the spiritual as an every-day interpreter of the natural world, to throw light on a thousand questions which otherwise have no meaning. The lower cannot explain the higher; but the higher can supplement and make plain the lower. To form a clear and correct idea of even a worldly life, you need the spiritual qualification first and always. Man here is buried in flesh and blood, and the only true Light reaching him is from above, and it is only by following that Light and climbing by the steps of faith, and hope, and memory, and patience, and love, that

he can rise free and clear above what is merely physical, and look off with extended and correct view on all below him."

"Now, Elbert, don't you see you are making my position uncomfortable by knocking the pins out from under me, and letting me fall flat as a flounder?"

"There are foundations which cannot be shaken; but the folly of living for this world has been demonstrated over and over again."

"Well, the fact is, I want to see the folly of it myself, and then I shall know from experience."

"Oh, the strange perversity of human nature! Why not learn from the experience of others?"

"Do we really know what we have not experienced?"

"I suppose not fully."

"Why then complain of me?"

"Because there are some things not desirable to know—for instance, how a man feels when suffering from remorse over the committal of a crime, or wasted faculties and opportunities."

"There you have me again! I see what you are coming at. Suppose we adjourn the meeting till early candle-lighting?"

"I fear we might as well, Charley."

"Oh! I will think this over sometime."

The silence, which followed, was broken by Charley.

"Elbert, do you know much about the Thorn-ton?"

"I know they are very nice people. I learned

incidentally of them once, though I had forgotten about it till my memory was refreshed."

"I was told to-day that they were rather aristocratic."

"Wealthy people are apt to have that reputation, and not always justly; but I like a little aristocracy of the right kind. Mark, I mean the genuine, not the codfish."

"Will my brother Elbert just explain a little, so I can get his idea?"

"Well, I like a certain amount of agreeable and polite formalities, since there must be forms, or methods of some kind. For example, I like to see a well-set table, the food in nice, pretty dishes, on a nice, pretty tablecloth, with flowers, if convenient, and other table adornments, such as a little forethought and taste may supply. Then I like to have the coarser food removed before the dessert is brought on, and to see no one rise from the table without a well-expressed excuse, until all are through eating. In short, Charley, I like to see an air of refinement in the home and outside of it, and an orderly procedure and politeness in the household affairs and family intercourse, free from all stiffness, because originating in a genuine respect and thoughtfulness for each and all."

"That is not a bad kind of aristocracy, Elbert; but the unnatural, uneasy, uncomfortable, put-on airs are a stench in my nostrils. Deliver me from codfish, anyway. I want none of that in mine. But, oh, Elbert! the height of earthly happiness,

the concentrated sweetness of life's most delectable joys, lie in an abundance of luxurious food, and in sufficient variety, with plenty of elbow-room (aristocratically speaking, you know!), and no hypercritical eyes to watch the rapid disappearance of the goodies. Every nerve in me thrills at the thought, and my gastric juices begin to bubble and boil, as if it would be a pleasure to them to tackle all I could put in my stomach. I wish I could portray to you the material glories of the day coming, when I shall sit down with my wide-awake Carrie at one end of the table, and myself at the other, and I am expected not to stand too much on the ceremony of going in, but to go in! That last clause is a hint from Shakespeare, or some other elegant fellow."

"All poetic thought with you, I see, must be a dance of the blood, like that of Saxe, and not of the spirit, like that of Tennyson. If you get a spiritual idea, you straightway clothe it in flesh and blood, and give it something to eat, and so your perversion of poetic sentiment is to be expected. Just think of your highest earthly paradise—stuffing the hole in your face with meats, and fowl, and pastry, and using your chin as a mill with which to grind it! Noble, isn't it?"

"Elbert Bloomfield! are you trying to flatter me?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, sir, I find it difficult to so construe your words. I will not sit—I will rise and stand so long as there is a doubt of your appreciation of

my superlative grandeur as a man every way. Behold this noble dome of thought, jutting out over eyes that look down on you like balls of fire, in very wonderment over your stupid lack of insight into the capabilities and powers of my ponderous brain ! But I will condescend to demonstrate, even to your apprehension, that I am not only some pumpkins, but great pumpkins. Even now, at the slightest bidding, the proof of my high position in the niche of literary fame comes bubbling up from the wells of genius. Listen to my poetic soul, and be dumb as the rocks on yonder shore ; listen with confusion of face, and be confounded."

Throwing back his head and shoulders, and folding his arms on his breast, and rolling his eyes as if nearly bursting with self-esteem, he recited the following lines :

" ' From the billowy green beneath me,
To the fathomless blue above,
The Creatures of God are happy
In the warmth of their summer love.
The infinite bliss of Nature
I feel in every vein ;
The light and the life of summer
Blossom in heart and brain.' "

"I wonder," he continued, looking down on me very pompously, "how you can hear me without shrinking away withered, and blighted, and blasted by the scorching thought of my overwhelming greatness !"

"How long were you in composing that fine poem?" I asked.

"How long? Did it not come forth at once, and spontaneously from my overflowing and superabundant thought?"

"Then it did not cost you as much labor as it did Bayard Taylor?"

"Bayard Taylor! Do you mean to insinuate that that poem is not mine? I want you to understand I bought the book containing it a long time ago, and it is my property. Besides, did not the poem pass through the alembic of my own memory, voice, and dramatic attitude? Bayard Taylor indeed! I think he preferred the money to the book, and thought it a fair exchange, or he would not have sold it."

"Of course," said I, continuing the serio-comic conversation; "but do you think you bought all the rights of authorship, when you bought that book?"

"No, sir, he had a perfect right to commence another book the next moment without consulting me in the least."

"You are a generous fellow!"

"I know it, Elbert, and yet I am not puffed up by it. It is my nature to be fair-minded and manly. I do not even now glory overmuch in your discomfiture in claiming that the poem I gave was not mine. Having proved that the front chair in the literary universe belongs to me, I will now resume my seat."

Here he put his thumbs in the arm-holes of

his vest, and spreading out his fingers, sat down with such an air of preposterous assumption of superiority that he was simple irresistible. If I did not have more lung capacity that night, and more muscle and nerve force from better circulation, it was not Charley's fault.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UGLY VISITOR.

REACTION came at last, as of course it should and will in all healthy minds, and we became quiet and reflective till we reached a good place for camping. That Ethel became mysteriously involved in some of these reflections it is not my purpose to affirm nor deny ; but I tried to school myself to the thought that her happiness was the first and only thing to be considered, and not mine. If I could do nothing as a lover to make her life round and full and sweet, I would keep from her all knowledge of my great love ; but I would always be a friend, and watch for opportunities to bring blessings down upon her, though no eye saw me but the eye of Him who is the source of all creature comforts.

We went early to bed under our little tent, pitched on the highest bluff we could find. Our bed was made soft by using the boughs in our boat, and, thanks to plenty of exercise in the open air, and the hearty enjoyments of the day, we slept well, and were awakened the next morning by the singing of the thrush and the oriole. There was a slight rain, and then the clouds scud

away, as if frightened at the approaching sun, which suddenly burst forth in glorious light, sending its bright and cheering rays along the valley, and among the trees, till every raindrop became illumined, and the face of nature wore an aspect of pensive beauty, like a beautiful woman smiling through her tears.

We got what we failed to get the night before, a view of the town we were to visit, with its suburbs of fine residences looking beautiful and attractive in the glamour of the dawn.

We had breakfasted, and Charley was standing outside the tent, while I was within, replacing food in our lunch-box, and rolling up our rubber blankets, when I heard a strange footstep, and looking out through a small hole in the tent, I saw a very ugly-looking tramp with a devil-may-care air, who immediately asked Charley where his companions were.

"My companions," Charley answered, "are the birds of the air, the fishes of the river, and the rabbits, squirrels, et cetera, of the woods." Inferring from this that Charley was alone, he demanded money, and received the following reply,

"What are your principles, man, to demand all a fellow has?"

"I hain't no principles what won't take money, which I must have," said the tramp.

"Don't you know that a man without principles is like a ship without a rudder?"

"I want yer money, and not yer gab."

"It is a great blessing to be poor, my little yon-

ker," said Charley, very coolly and provokingly, scanning the tall, bony tramp from head to foot. "People who have money worry lest they lose it; whereas you don't have to hide your wallet when there is nothing in it."

"Are ye goin' ter hand over?" demanded the tramp savagely, taking a step forward.

"You must not hurry me," Charley replied, still calm and fearless. "Besides, I have a few remarks to make to you."

"Darn yer remarks," growled the tramp grinding his teeth.

"My remarks need no darning, but I'm afraid your character does. Those ugly holes in your soul should be mended at once."

"Your money or I'll——"

"One question, please; why not labor and earn money, if you want it?"

"That's my business," hissed the now exasperated tramp. "Fork over, or I'll smash yer mug fer ye."

"Call my face a mug!" exclaimed Charley, in well-feigned anger. "Money is trash; but defame my transcendently lustrous countenance, and you defame me. Oh, you dry-boned villain! shall I rend you as the tiger rends its prey? I cannot restrain myself."

I was watching the tramp, who seemed bewildered at this sudden change of front; but thinking I saw a knife in his hand, I jumped out, and exclaimed, "What is the matter?"

"Oh! Elbert, hold me! hold me!" Charley

almost shrieked, "or I shall light on this vile blackleg, and tear him into a thousand shoe-strings."

"Hold me!" he yelled again, as I clasped him round the waist, while he jumped, and snapped his jaws, and clawed the air like a wild man.

"Run," said I to the tramp, "if you value your life, run; for I cannot hold him a minute longer."

The tramp edged off, and then took to his heels, his long, fiery-red hair flying behind him, and his loose garments bagging and flapping about his skeleton frame, as if he had just escaped from some graveyard, with avenging flames prematurely in hot pursuit. He was scarcely out of sight when we exploded with laughter, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, till we fell to the ground in sheer weakness. We made several attempts to rise, when something would be said to set us off again in another paroxysm of merriment. The picture of the flying tramp was so absurd we could not get it out of our minds, and it was a long time before we felt sufficiently sure of ourselves to strike tent and carry our luggage into the boat.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DINNER WITH THE THORNTONS.

THE sail was uneventful to—, where we landed, and looked over the town; and then, laying in a fresh supply of canned meats and other imperishable articles of food, we dropped a little farther down the river, and secured our boat in a safe and obscure place. Here we used each other's eyes as looking-glasses, and made ourselves as presentable as possible, and then started in search of the Thornton establishment, where we were to dine. We found it with no great difficulty, and Miss Thornton herself met us at the door, and received us so pleasantly and cordially, that we at once felt both at home and glad we had come. We were ushered into a large parlor with open fireplace and brass andirons, and roomy, old-fashioned furniture, made for comfort rather than elegance, and in perfect keeping with the solid, substantial appearance of the house outside. When she excused herself for a few minutes, Charley said, as she disappeared,

"There is no codfish about her."

"She is above that," I answered, "and has too much brain to care for empty formalities."

"One of the aping kind," added Charley, "would have let a servant give us our first introduction to the interior of the home, even though she might have been ready, waiting and watching, with nothing to hinder her from opening the door herself."

Miss Thornton returned with a rather short, thickset, round-faced man, and introduced him as her brother. He had not the easy grace of his sister, but was as intellectual, and as frank and hearty in his greetings, and we were at once on very easy terms with him as well as with his sister. Addressing me, he said :

"I feel somewhat acquainted with you, Professor Bloomfield ; for I was one of a favored audience that listened to you on a subject which interested Theo, here, and myself very much indeed. I remember your face very distinctly and the general drift of thought, and even some of the sentences you favored us with that day."

"A few listeners like you, Mr. Thornton," I said, "would be invaluable to any speaker."

"Perhaps I am not always a good listener, Professor, but your subject, and the views you presented, were just the kind of food I was hungry for; though I did not know I was so hungry till you began to feed me, and then I saw I had been starving for precisely that nourishment. Had not the supply come as it did, and when it did, I should have gone over into open and avowed scepticism. And yet," he added, striking his fat knee with waxing earnestness, "if you will believe

it, I heard church-members criticising you for making Christianity so comprehensive and simple ! To come out into the sunlight of practical common sense seemed to blind their unaccustomed eyes, and their bantam religion fainted at the idea of going into the struggles of every-day life, especially business. It left them no cloak of mystery to shield them from the responsibilities which light and knowledge bring. Like the Romish Church, they would put out the light which loving and profound research throws on the most important subject engaging the human mind. Such persons do an incalculable amount of injury. They repel sensible men by misinterpreting Christianity. They came near preventing me, by their imbecile twaddle, from seeing any beauty, or nobility, or helpfulness, in the religion of Jesus Christ. Can such be Christians, Professor Bloomfield ? ”

“ If you mean representative Christians, or mature Christians, or intelligent, desirable Christians, I should answer in the negative.”

“ Can they be Christians in any sense ? ”

“ I think we must admit the possibility, as there are infantile Christians and mature Christians, the intellectually wise and the intellectually foolish. A person may have a little grace covered up under a great amount of ignorance and superstition. Unless we believe that, what shall we call some of the Old Testament worthies,—to say nothing of some New Testament professors of religion,—and how shall we account for the salvation of any dark-minded, present-day heathen ? ”

"Is there any sliding scale in the holiness of God to accommodate the low-down Christian?"

"Certainly not. God is perfect, immutably so, and needs not become less holy to reach the low-down; for He comes to them by His compassion with instruction and help, and in the person of Jesus Christ, but the sliding scale must be with us, and must be upwards. We must be holy as He is holy, but it must be that a little grace will make us so; for if the seed is in us it is holy and must do its work, though it be as small as a mustard seed."

"That will take time, and if Christians die in all stages of progress, how can they all go to one heaven?"

"So far as heaven is a state, they will not in my opinion."

"Do you believe in an intermediate state?"

"I do; it is a matter of every-day experience."

"I don't think I understand you."

"I mean only that every progressive person is always in an intermediate state between what he leaves behind and what he is approaching."

"Oh! yes, certainly—ha! ha! There is no getting round that good sense. And you believe that will hold true of the next world?"

"Yes, in all worlds where there is progress."

"Will there be as many heavenly states, then, as there are individuals?"

"That seems to be about the way it is here, to state it strongly, and Jesus himself says, In My Father's house are many mansions."

"Will not differing degrees of perfection interfere with companionship?"

"It does not here, unless the difference is too marked. It is the good and bad that will not mix. Goodness everywhere tends to unite. There is such a thing as a perfect babe, as well as a perfect man, and the two are not inharmonious, but are rather drawn, the one to the other in love. Every one, it seems to me, will be happy in his own place, just where he is fitted to be, and for the time prefers to be, not to remain stationary, but to advance through all eternity, and it will be His delight to help every one else to advance. There can be no such thing as envy, because there will be nothing to envy, unless it be the love which each will feel towards one and all."

"The growth will be intellectual, will it not?"

"Every way that can enlarge and ennoble the personality; otherwise it could not be heaven, it seems to me."

"Then, to come back pretty close to my first question, Brother Bloomfield, is there any excuse for a Christian remaining in ignorance and superstition, and a consequent unprogressive state, where the advantages for study are so great as in a country like ours?"

"It would seem not."

"Is it not a too common fault among church-members that they do not sufficiently feel the inducements and urgency of growth in all spiritual knowledge for their own good and the acceptance of Christian principles by others? If they love

Christianity as they profess, they should try so to interpret it as to commend it to the intelligent judgment of mankind, and thereby extend its sway."

"Alas! I have to admit that likewise."

"It seems to me, Professor Bloomfield, that Christian knowledge lags behind every other knowledge."

"How about medicine, Mr. Thornton?"

"Medicine, I admit, is a little uncertain; physicians often have to strike at the disease in the dark, and many times hit the patient instead of the disease, owing to the fact that diseases are constantly being modified by heredity and complications with other diseases."

"Diseases are nearly as subtle and deceptive as sin with which Christianity has to contend."

There was a general laugh at this.

"Well," resumed Mr. Thornton, "if physicians sometimes kill the bodies of men, ignorant and shallow interpreters of Christianity do what is worse, they mangle, if they do not kill, the soul. In some things even medicine has reached the rock-bed of truth, and can be relied upon; and surgery and dentistry have each been reduced to a positive science. The natural sciences, too, are marching on with no uncertain tread, sweeping the fields clean of doubt so far as they go, relieving human labor and want, facilitating international and other communication, promoting social intercourse, and ameliorating the condition of mankind generally. Indeed, all knowledge is be-

coming more and more clear and positive except religion, which is taught as vaguely as ever. It has no clear, well-defined steps out of sin into holiness. Nowhere has it been reduced to a science in its methods of growth. If it had it would have done more for the world. Why has not Christianity produced more and grander specimens of manhood and womanhood?"

"Theological teachers are, perhaps, some at fault, and then it may arise in part from the fact that ministers are more intent on the conversion of their congregations than on their progress after conversion. Better Christians, however, would make preaching easier and more effectual."

"Yes, indeed, and in preaching to the unconverted they might improve vastly. They tell us to come to Jesus, and their converts get up in prayer-meeting and tell us to come to Jesus, but what they mean by it is not so clear, and they give the impression that they don't know themselves. The whole question of conversion, and especially how to overcome sin, and grow in all the graces belonging to a beautiful life, are too much, and it seems to me needlessly, in the fog. You are the only one who ever gave me any clear, steady light on these things. If men have felt certain things, and know they have, why can't they speak of their experience in that plain, candid way they would speak of their business? Why so loose and vague in religious matters, and so clear and definite in their ideas on other subjects? Is it because in the latter case they know what they

are talking about, and in the former they do not?"

"As I intimated, I think preachers may be a little at fault. Like priest, like people."

"If I could have my way, Professor Bloomfield, I would wipe out every theological seminary in the land."

"Why so, Mr. Thornton?"

"Because I believe they turn out preachers with their backs to the future and their faces to the past. They mould them all, too, after one pattern, despoiling them of every original and natural aptitude for the illustrative enforcement of their ideas, and reducing them so nearly to machines that they will run in denominational grooves, and never get out unless thrown out by an earthquake, or some intellectual convulsion, and then they scarcely get awake enough to see over ancient and sectarian lines."

"Our theological seminaries may not encourage independent thought and original methods as much as they might safely, and doubtless might give more time to the science of Christian living; but they are useful, I think, in their way, with all their faults, and their destruction would not remedy the defects you so strongly deprecate."

"I can only judge the seminaries by their preachers, who come forth with their eyes either turned inwards or reset in the back or their heads, so that they are neither independent nor varied, and can tell us nothing new how to make Christianity helpful in everyday life."

"That reminds me, Mr. Thornton, of what I have long felt would be a great step towards a much needed reform; and that is the establishment by wealthy laymen in our theological seminaries, of professorships on applied Christianity, especially on the science of character-building."

Miss Thornton here exchanged looks with her brother, and though interested before, appeared doubly so now, her dark eyes sparkling with delight, as if she was entertaining a new and welcome thought.

"The aim," I went on, "should be to make the process of reformation and development, by statement, argument and illustration, as clear and practical in all its steps as the building of a house, so that the dullest could see the way and walk therein. In short, the best and deepest thinking of the age should be turned to this most important of all subjects and, so, as far as possible, reduce to a science the method of building up the Christian character, or enlarging and ennobling Christian manhood and womanhood."

"It seems to me, Professor Bloomfield, you are just the one to give the first course of lectures on that subject," said Miss Thornton, looking at me a little timidly but eagerly.

"Yes," assented Mr. Thornton, "and if you will give such a course here next winter, we will relieve you of all care in the expense of publication."

"You are very kind indeed!" I exclaimed in surprise, "and I thank you very much; but I am

comparatively a mere stripling, and not equal to the task. Older and abler men should lead off in a matter so momentous."

"Older men are not so well qualified to speak on such a subject as you are," Mr. Thornton asserted emphatically; "for you have thought of it, and they have not."

"Do not refuse," pleaded Miss Thornton shyly, and blushing in her earnestness. Not heeding my plea, they went on urging, till I could only look from one to the other, bewildered for a moment at their earnest persistency. At length, fearing their pressing desire might be a cry from their own hearts for help, I said:

"I find myself unable at present to refuse what is so cordially and generously asked, lest I be found closing my eyes and ears to a plain call of the Master. I can do nothing in preparation at present, but in the autumn, or as soon as I take up work again, I will consider it."

"The more you consider it, the more you must feel that duty calls you to this work, and I shall regard the matter as settled," said Mr. Thornton confidently.

"You will make our house your home during the lectures," said Miss Thornton, "and we shall look forward to your coming with a great deal of satisfaction, determined to be very unreconciled if you disappoint us;" and so saying she left the room, returning with Miss Horton, whom we met at the picnic the previous day.

We at once repaired to the dining-room under

the leadership of Mr. Thornton, Miss Thornton passing us along and following in the rear. A tiny wood-fire was burning in the fireplace, more for ornament than use, and the table was richly set with old-fashioned china and solid silver, and adorned with cut flowers in beautiful antique vases, and a button-hole bouquet tastefully arranged with each napkin. Miss Thornton presided with that easy grace which natural endowment and custom give, and did her full share in anticipating and filling any gap in the conversation by her ready wit, and suggestive questions. Charley was happy. It was just the meal he liked, and there was plenty of time to eat it; for it progressed with that delicate leisure which is the mark of good breeding and true culture.

Between courses we told some of our adventures down the river, Charley touching them off in high-comedy style, which produced much merriment. Mr. and Miss Thornton entertained us with vivid descriptions of neighboring scenery and incidents of travel, and Miss Horton confined herself mostly to giving queer and unexpected meanings to what was said.

We all ate heartily, but the slowness with which we ate, the good cheer with which we swallowed our food, and the laughter with which we pursued it, and finally the stroll we took in the flower-garden in the open air, at the suggestion of Miss Thornton, immediately after dinner, were the best guarantee against indigestion and the horrors of dyspepsia.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE THORNTON SUMMER-HOUSE.

AFTER exploring the garden, the Thorntons and myself entered a pretty little summer-house provided with comfortable rockers, and sat down, while Charley and Miss Horton were at the other end of the garden apparently satisfied with each other's company.

"Professor Bloomfield," asked Mr. Thornton, "to renew one point in the conversation we had before dinner, how do you account for the fact that so many so-called Christians exhibit nothing of the disposition of Christ?"

"If they have not the spirit of Christ, they are none of His, according to Scripture. They are deceived by superstitious forms and technicalities empty of anything real. They are in the condition of the fellow I heard of in our civil war, who, as an answer to the question what company he belonged to, was boasting that Jesus Christ was the Captain of his salvation, when a soldier spoke up, 'Well, sir, all I have to say is, you are a long ways from headquarters!'"

"Pretty good! pretty good! ha, ha! That soldier hit the case of a large proportion of

church-members, I'm thinking. Why, I have seen them in their business meetings display as much selfishness, and even bad temper, as any body of worldly sinners."

"It is sadly true, Mr. Thornton, that too many have so little of the love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, that it does not control them steadily, and they drop down too easily out of the love-life into their old, selfish, animal life."

"Many of them do not seem to have any love-life except in prayer-meetings; and that is what kills the evidence, to many worldly-wise, that Christianity has any power to make men better."

"Too true, Christians, and especially Christian teachers, forget that it is perhaps just as important that the good be made better, as it is that the bad be made good. If this be not true, there is no explanation of the discipline of sorrow that good men receive at the hand of Providence. Besides, Jesus seems to urge the feeding of His flock as strongly as their conversion. I have long felt that the Christian world has waked up to only half its duty; and the neglected half is the study of Christ. To know Him crucified is to have His disposition, His self-sacrificing, charitable, and loving spirit; and the fruit of the Spirit, we are told, is 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering (there is a good deal of suffering in the world, but not much long-suffering), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control,' or the government of all the desires."

"How many Christians exhibit such fruit as that, Professor Bloomfield?"

"Alas! it might be difficult to find one, Mr. Thornton. If I had ten such to support me in Christian influence and service, I could build up a church without much urging of the gospel upon people. Those ten persons would make the gospel so attractive by their lives that the church-doors would be thronged by eager seekers."

"Yes, indeed! and now if Christians are in earnest and can have this most effective way of drawing us by exhibiting the disposition of Christ in its beauty, why don't they have it and exercise it?"

"It is owing partly to a want of knowledge how to proceed, this subject being little studied, and because conversion is held practically to be the only important thing. A person at conversion is said to be saved, and he looks upon himself as saved, and therefore does not feel the urgent need of anything more as he ought and would, if taught that, at conversion, he has only entered the school of Christ, and has everything to learn.

"I believe we are progressing towards the day when the whole gospel will be preached and practiced, as much as a part of it is now. The importance of growing up into the fulness of the stature of Christ must, and will be, explained and enforced, as well as conversion. Why, conversion is only the beginning of correct living! When I send a ball into the air, the point where it turns to come back is the point of conversion, but how slow it moves at first! and how fast it increases

in force till it strikes the earth! So a Christian, once started in the divine life, should advance with accelerated speed till the end comes here, and then the angels will sing, Lift up your heads, O, ye gates! and let this child of glory in. It is indeed sad that the Master has no better representatives on the earth, but, slow as the progress is, there has been progress, and the times are ripening, I believe, for a decided impetus to be given in the right direction. There is a great yearning, growing more and more widespread, for something deeper and grander and more glorious than what Christianity has thus far produced; and this yearning is a prophecy that will have its fulfilment. It only needs, perhaps, some new Luther, fired with an unquenchable zeal and an invincible faith, to bring about a new and great reformation hardly second in importance to the first. There may be reformers before this reformation, as there were before the first; but each apparent failure will only help ripen the times, and prepare the way for the appointed and successful Luther, when he comes.

“The time has gone by, or is fast going by, when a mere historical Christianity can satisfy. We cannot rest upon the past. We crave and need a present Christ, and a living, forceful Christianity. What can Christianity do *now*? is the great test question, and it must be answered by living examples. Will the examples be forthcoming? I have not the least doubt of it. Christianity, to-day even, is better taught and better lived than

ever before, however discouraging some things may appear ; and a higher, broader, deeper, truer kingdom of heaven is at hand. The creed of the future will be a pledge to prayerfully pattern after the loving disposition of Christ, and to strive everywhere and always to exemplify the fruit of the Spirit."

"Professor Bloomfield, the fact that you see all the defects I see, and perhaps more, and still have confidence in Christianity, gives me encouragement to hope and believe ; but another difficulty stands in my way. Could not the ordinary prayer-meeting be made more sensible and helpful?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Thornton."

"I ask because at the last one I attended, the whole meeting was nothing but sentimental brag from beginning to end, and it was no great exception to the others I have attended. One said, I love Jesus ; and another, Jesus loves me ; and another, I am pressing on towards the kingdom ; another, I am washed and made clean ; another, I am saved—come, poor sinner, and be saved too, and so on ; not one helpful idea for the conflicts of life ; and I came away feeling that I had been feeding on husks ! Can God be pleased with such unseemly self-assertion ? If they had told their experience in the battle with sin, I might have carried away something from the meeting. I like emotion, but not pumped-up emotion. Why should not the best thought be put into worship, Professor Bloomfield ?"

"Religious subjects are certainly worthy of all the thought we can put into them, whether in the prayer and conference meeting, or elsewhere ; but we must bear in mind that all Christians are not capable of much thought, and the weak ones should not be discouraged from expressing, as best they may, the religious life that is in them ; for life without expression, like the tree which puts forth no new shoots, soon dies. By full and free expression the weak Christian may grow and become strong ; but, while the little ones should be fostered and cheered on their way, the high aim of the prayer-meeting need not and should not be sacrificed. The leader should not confine the meeting to babes.

"Those of experience, who have something to say, and know how to say it, are needed for the instruction and help of all, and should be the controlling spirits, the younger and more emotional coming in to give freshness and variety and impetus to the meeting. Every class of gifts, however halting, has its uses, and will help somebody, and should be encouraged ; but, as before intimated, the thoughtful should see to it that they contribute something helpful and inspiring, so that the people may go away with their emotions distended with ideas to think about during the week.

"The trouble is, one talks without thinking, another thinks without talking, and those who both think and talk, are few. Persons who do not think, have little or no appreciation of the

value of thought ; and yet, there is nothing more substantial, and lasting, more fraught with the possibilities of germinative and procreative power than a live thought, especially a Christian thought. We are not making the best use of the prayer-meeting ; it should be more of an experience meeting, more of a school for study of the means of grace, for comparing Christian exercises and methods of overcoming the world, or selfish tendencies,—a meeting of mutually helpful sympathy, and prayerful yearning to be made worthy of being useful to others, as we have opportunity.”

“ How would it do to give out subjects beforehand, such as, how to conquer a bad temper, to resist temptation and overcome sin in the heart, to become conscious of acceptance with God and of His constant indwelling, etc.?”

“ I think the giving out of such very important subjects occasionally would be an admirable plan, tending to spiritual growth, if Christians would give them hard, earnest, prayerful study, and then come to meeting in a teachable mood, and compare their varied views and experiences of the matter in hand, the pastor, perhaps, at the close, summing up the different helpful thoughts and suggestions, so that the members could easily grasp and carry them away. Our church covenant meetings, especially, might be made more of a school for the study of Christian experiences, both successes and failures ; more of a waiting on God, and learning of Him, and so be more helpful, uplifting, and inspiring means of grace. At any rate, something

must be done to lead the church into higher Christian living, so that it can preach the gospel more effectually than it does now ; for the first step in reforming others is to reform ourselves, whether it be Christian reformation or any other."

Mr. Thornton here spoke slowly, thoughtfully, and with a good deal of feeling :—

"I should like to be a member of a real school of Christ ; for that is what I deeply need. I could not join as an ornament, but merely as a learner. My great desire is not so much to be saved as to be fit to be saved, to be accounted worthy, not merely by men, but by God, who sees down into the centre and core of the heart. I wish to be of use in the world by partaking of the character and manhood of Jesus of Nazareth."

"My dear Thornton," I said, warmly clasping him by the hand, "you are just the kind of man God wants in His service to-day. Men are needed who seek Christianity, not as a screen from eternal fire, but as a transforming power that shall make them so pure that fire will find nothing in them to burn. How much you would help Dr. Blentwood, if a member of his church ! You strengthen my belief that God is moving in the direction in which I think and feel so much, and that some time I shall have the sympathy of the best Christian minds."

"I do not see how any Christian can fail to feel the desirability of having your views prevail."

"Ah ! you little know how hard it is to move the Christian world in any new direction, and how suspicious even good men are of any change.

Why, even Dr. Blentwood has been accused of Unitarianism because he presses the importance of Christian character !”

“What ! are they so narrow as to reject a truth because held by another denomination ? I wonder they do not go barefoot because infidels wear shoes !”

“The fact, I suspect, is that Dr. Blentwood disturbs the self-complacency of church-members by preaching to them ; whereas the gospel, in their view, means preaching to sinners. This is another proof that the church is not wholly sanctified, and therefore needs preaching to. And then, there is such a thing as a depressing, repressing fear of getting out of old lines of thought and action, which deprive men of that breadth of judgment and teachableness of spirit so essential to the appreciation of anything at all new, though it be but an old truth in a new light.

“But, to recur to what you said, there is, undoubtedly, an unreasoning prejudice in most minds against any truth held by an opposing denomination, perhaps because they think it is in bad company. If the early Protestants did not go barefoot because Roman Catholics wore shoes, they rejected almost everything else practised by them. They would not even have Scripture quotations on the walls back of their pulpits because, they said, it savored of popery. But, ever since, Protestantism has been going back after truths left behind in the Romish Church. Dr. Robinson used to say that, to stand alone, a bag must have some-

thing in it, at least straw or stubble ; and so every sect, however heterodox, must have some truth in it or it would collapse."

"Professor Bloomfield, if church-members were all like you, I could not stay out of the church."

"Dear Brother Thornton, I am grateful for your appreciation ; but remember, if the church were all to your liking, it would not need you so much as it does now. Isn't it a part of your mission to help the church up to the true standard ? And, moreover, is it not your imperative duty to put your influence where it will tell for the right ? If God has been working on your heart, is it not your privilege as well as duty to proclaim it before the world, and buckle on the armor in His cause ?"

"I have not thought of it in just that way, but, as much as I dislike to come in contact with bigoted people, if I knew I was a Christian, I would not hesitate."

"Do you desire with your whole being to have the kingdom of heaven set up within you ?"

"I do, and would do anything to secure it."

"Then you will be willing to pray with me ; and you, Miss Thornton, I know, will join us, for you are only waiting, like your brother. There is enough here to claim the promise, the special one, I mean. Let us unite our hearts on the one thing at hand."

We then and there knelt down in the little summer-house, and my prayer, with choking utterance, was followed by touching petitions, with a

full surrender of their hearts, from both brother and sister; and when we arose a new light was shining in their eyes, for their tears were tears of joy. They had become conscious that they loved God and were members of His spiritual family; and, when seated again, we clasped hands in our mutual gladness, and sang with overflowing hearts, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DYING TRAMP.

AT the first pause in our singing a ragged, unkempt, barefooted boy looked in upon us very much out of breath, and in a scared manner said, looking at Mr. Thornton, "Please, sir, paup is killed and wants ter see ye, and have ye bring a man what knows what God thinks."

"Who are you?" asked Thornton.

"I am paup's boy."

"Well, who is paup?"

"Paup is the ole man, my dad, what struck marm this mornin', and then got struck his own se'f with er derrick, an'—an' he's awful sorry, sir, he is."

"What is your name?"

"My name's Bill Durgin, and paup tole me ter come fer ye, 'cause you'd been kind ter 'im."

"Oh! you live over in the hollow, near the brook?"

"Yeah, and paup and marm's in a awful hurry fer ye ter come."

Mr. Thornton jumped up, saying, "Will you go with me, Brother Bloomfield?"

"Certainly," said I, and we were off im-

mediately in a direct line across field, and were soon at the door of a rough-looking shanty. We entered without knocking, and saw lying on a clean, but scanty bed, a large, coarse-featured man, whom I recognized as Charley's would-be robber! Remorse had evidently sunk both beak and talons deep into his soul. He had a wild, untamed, out-door look, like that of an eagle brought down suddenly to earth, and deprived for the first time of its freedom. Animal-like and uncouth as he was, there was something all the more pathetic in his look, as the first sorrow, probably, of his life, went hotly surging through all the range of his meditations. As we approached, he looked up, and Mr. Thornton asked :

"What is the matter, Durgin?"

"Oh, Mr. Thornton, I'm killed, and a darn fool—that's what's the matter."

"Have you had a physician?"

"Yas, where I got hurt; but what I want ter know, Mr. Thornton, is, what God does with darn fools. He don't want 'em foolin' round Him, I s'pose, and if He puts 'em in kettles over the fire, and biles 'em, as I've seen the picter of, and has the devil's dance round 'em with sharp pitchforks ter keep 'em in, I don't see what good'll that do—do you, Mr. Thornton? 'Twon't bile the fool out of um, will it?"

"No, that is not the way God makes men wise; but why do you call yourself a fool?"

"'Cause I *is* one, worse'n wicked, fer I tried ter rob a man this mornin', and 'cause I couldn't,

I came hum mad, and knocked Polly down, and then went ter Jones's, and hadn't been ter work five minutes afore God'lmighty knocked me down for my cussedness; and Polly says they brought me hum, and here I is killed! I'd been drinking a leetle too much. Oh! O—h!"

"When you struck your wife, Durgin, you struck the best friend you have, and without reason, too."

"Reason! does a darn fool want a reason fer doin' anythin'?"

"Perhaps not."

"No p'raps 'bout it. Look at that air Polly, and see ef ye can find any reason fer hittin' her, 'cept the reason of a fool what's got no reason."

Polly began to cry.

"Gods' agin me, Pol! ef ye'll hit me with ther poker, it'll do me a heap o' good."

"Yer didn't mean ter, Jim."

"Yer too good! Pol, don't say that. Why don't yer throw ther tongs at me, and maul me with the mop and fire-shovel? That'd make things more kinder squar', and I'd feel better. Oh, Pol! Oh, Mr. Thornton! I've been the plaguetakest fool ye ever laid eyes on, and what's God goin' ter do with me? What's ther use o' fools, anyway? All ther devil can use me fer is ter make fun of, and I'm 'fraid he'll carry his fun too fer. Nobody wants me fer any good."

"I want ye, paup."

"Pol! Pol! ef ye'd broomstick me hard on the face, ye'd comfort me some. Yer goodness is

what leaves me without underpinin'. Oh, Jim Durgin!"—addressing himself in great agony—"yer fool you! yer empty-headed numbskull! yer never got any sense till God'lmighty knocked it inter ye with ther derrick. Yer debts are mountain high, and ye've nothin' ter pay with, yer tarnal idyut! Oh! Mr. Thornton, what shall I do?"

"Mr. Durgin," Thornton replied, "I have brought you Professor Bloomfield, a wise and good Christian, who will advise you better than I can."

"Wise and good, eh?" said the injured man, turning his eyes upon me. "Yer must feel mighty tickled not ter be a fool like me."

"A wise man once said," I answered "'If all fools wore white caps, we should seem a flock of geese.'"

"He thought 'em pooty thick, did he? None of um such fools 's I've been though, and ef they be, I don't want none o' their comp'ny, for I'm sick of myself. Ugh! ef my soul should bust, what a mess! What can God do with a man, what ain't satisfied ter be what he is?"

"He can make him wise unto salvation."

"What d'yer say?"—trying to rise on his elbow, and his face brightening.

"If you are truly sorry for your past life, and with all your heart wish to be a good man, God can convert you, and make you fit for the company even of angels."

"I'd be too mighty big a job for that, wouldn't I?"

"He has declared through His Prophets, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, who revealed Him

more clearly still, that whosoever will may come and have real, true, divine life like that of God Himself; and 'whosoever' means you, wicked as you have been."

"Me!" His whole frame shook with eagerness as he added, "Kin yer 'splain how 't could be done?"

"Before Molly bakes her bread, she puts something into the dough to make it rise, does she not?"

"Yas, emptin's."

"Well, God can put His love, His divine life into your soul, and make it rise into likeness with Him, eventually killing out all the weeds of sin."

"How'll I squar' the 'count for ther ole fool I've been?"

"Your folly will be remembered no more against you; for you will become a new creature, old things passing away, and all things becoming new, and you will have nothing but love for God and everybody, and everybody nothing but love for you."

"Hain't it too late when a man's killed?"

"He will take you now, just as you are, if you sincerely repent, and crave forgiveness, and give yourself wholly to Him."

"Oh, there's nothin' but ther fag-end of me left! and ain't it mean ter give Him that?"

"It is mean not to have given Him all your life; but it is meaner still, if that be possible, not to give Him what little life you have left. God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is full of tenderness, self-

sacrifice, and compassionate, helpful love, and is waiting to begin a new life within you, to save you; and you ought not to lose a moment of time in giving Him all your gratitude and all your love."

"That's so, whatever He does ter me, hain't it, Mr. Thornton?"

"Certainly," Mr. Thornton replied, "you owe everything to Him."

"And ther way I've been payin' Him is actin' like a pesky, tarnation fool all my born days!"

"Please don't use such harsh language."

"Why, good man, shouldn't I be hash' on myself? fer I hain't hit myself half hard 'nough yet. Why not call things what they is?"

"Well, I would rather hear you say you are very, very sorry for your past wicked life, and that you would give everything you have and are to become a good Christian man, such as God would have you."

"Good man alive! sorry ain't no name for it; it's too dogonned tame!"

"Then, do you not desire above all things to get rid of all that past life that you now so hate?"

"Hang it, good man! I'd get inter one o' them air devil's kittles and be biled, if they could bile ther dang stuff outer me; but they can't, can they?"

"No, punishment cannot make a new man of you; God alone can do that through your repentance."

"Wall, I wanter do what'll make ther 'count square."

"The account is square already," said Miss Thornton, coming in from the open door, where she had hesitated a moment, and overheard the last words of the dying man.

"Oh, Lady Thornton! you've helped us out many times, and given Molly fine things, and paid her too fer workin', and so you're all right; but how can ther 'count be square with me?"

"Jesus died," she replied, "and paid every debt you owe, and all you have to do is to believe, and give your heart to Jesus."

"Then I've got ter pay Him, and what's ther dif?"

"He asks no pay but your love. He paid the debt, because He knew you could not."

"I will though; fer I've skinned my way long 'nough from other folks, and I'm goin' it squar now, ef it kills me. Ef He won't let me work out my tax fer Him, I'll go down and squirm it out with t'other chap, till He says it's square."

Miss Thornton, perplexed, looked at me beseechingly, and then went over to comfort Molly.

"Mr. Durgin," I resumed, "the only way for you to pay your debts is by obedience to God's commands, and He commands you to give Him your heart that He may love it into life. He pities you with an infinite pity, and has declared in Jesus, His Son, that He will forgive and forget all your past sins, and let you begin life anew, making you His child by giving you of his Spirit,

love and wisdom, if you will only give yourself entirely into His hands, and submit wholly to Him, who knows just what you need, and better than you can ask or think. Remember, Mr. Durgin, it is the one you owe God Himself, who is waiting to forgive the debt."

"Oh, I thought Lady Thornton said Jesus paid it."

"Jesus revealed God's willingness to forgive; it is God, in Jesus Christ, who accepts you, and declares the debt off the moment you sincerely ask it. If you could make the past and yourself right before God, you would not need Him as a Helper and Saviour."

"That's so, tru's yer live, by hokey! My ole tough skull begins ter crack open a bit, and let in ther light. I see God's got ter take me as I be, ef He takes me at all, and Oh! Oh! what a mess o' poor stuff He'll find in me!"

"I think I see your difficulty," said Mr. Thornton. "You find it hard to believe that God can forgive so bad a man as you have been."

"That's it, Mr. Thornton; I've been worse'n pusley."

"And yet God sees something in you to love."

"Somethin' in me ter love! Did yer say that, Mr. Thornton?"

"Yes, and has proved that He loves you by sending His Son into the world to reveal it. He has a heart large enough, and loving enough, to take you just as you are, with all your selfishness, and, adopting you into the family of His Son,

make you a worthy child in the great household of the good, and a partaker of His glory."

"Oh! this is all too good ter be true, hain't it, Mr. Bl—Bloomfield?" said the trembling man, with all the eagerness and half joy of a struggling hope.

"It is God's truth," I replied.

"Oh! is God so good as that? That is the God I want. Oh, talk with Him, Mr. Bloomfield! and tell Him I want Him ter make me good right off. Tell Him I'm good fer nothin', but want ter be forgiven, and do jest as He says. I want ter be a little child agin, His child, and mind Him in everything. Oh! do try mighty hard fer me, wont yer, Mr. Bloomfield, right off now?"

We all knelt down by his bed in united prayer. He interrupted me by saying, "Tell Him, how sorry I am fer everything, and want Him ter take care o' Polly." Afterwards, he placed his hand on mine saying, "Put my hand inter His, and ask Him ter lead me, 'cause I don't know, much, and ter hole on tight, and I'll foller Him anywhere," soon adding, "There! that's it. Now I've got safe holt. Thank Him, and tell Him Jim Durgin's all His—all His."

When we arose, he opened his eyes, and the tears for the first time rolled down his bony cheek; but they were tears we were glad to see, for his face had lost not only the hunted, wild look of an animal at bay, but all its painful expression, and soon it was all aglow with happy

resignation, and the joy of a mind at peace, while we sung at his request :

"I am so glad that my Father in Heaven
Tells of His love in the Book He has given."

At the close he said, "It's growin' dark. Polly, come and take holt my tother hand. There, you must be glad ther derrick hit me Pol, fer I never had no sense afore, and might never seen ye on t'other side. Don't cry, good Pol. Mr. and Lady Thornton, will ye look arter Polly a little?"

"She shall go home with us, if she will," both replied in a breath.

"Do yer hear that, Pol? And by-and-bye I'll come fer ye over there, where the light is, and where ther white ones are walkin' in the mist by ther river, and we'll be tergether agin, and happy, 'cause I won't be bad ter ye any more. I'll make it all square then. Don't cry, Pol; fer ye'll be better off now. How dark 'tis! Polly! I can't see yer, Pol. Speak ter me. Did yer speak, Pol? Good Pol, I'll come back fer ye. I'll do my best fer ye. Happy days comin,' Pol. Ther waves are comin' in! There! I'm driftin' out. Good-bye, Pol. I'm driftin' out—driftin—out."

The voice had died down to a whisper, and now naught was heard save the sobbing of poor Polly on the pulseless hand clasped in hers. James Durgin, let us trust, had "drifted" away to a safe harbor on the other side, though his body lay wrecked and dead on this shore.

The forgiving Polly could not be induced to leave her sad home until after the funeral, when she took up her permanent abode, as servant, in the home of the Thorntons.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE THORNTON PARLORS.

WHEN we returned the setting sun was sending along the surface of the ground long shafts of dull fire, causing the shadows to dart grotesquely in and out among the trees, and, seeing no one in or about the summer-house, we repaired to the parlors, where we found Charley was being highly entertained by Miss Horton at the piano—to whom we explained our unceremonious absence, an absence, barring the cause, apparently very gratifying to them.

It was too late to renew our journey, and Charley and I were easily persuaded to spend the night with the Thorntons. Besides, Mr. Thornton wished to have further conversation with me on certain subjects lying near his heart.

After tea we gathered in a circle for serious talk.

“That man,” said Thornton, referring to James Durgin, “just began to live as he began to die; and he furnishes an apt illustration of what we were talking about before dinner. As your remarks implied, something more than place is requisite for perfect happiness, and as this is corrobora-

rated by experience, which teaches that two persons may live in one room, the one happy and the other miserable, and, therefore, since the man who just begins to live on his death-bed cannot go straight, or immediately, to the same heaven or state of bliss with the man who has lived all his life a growing Christian, and ripened into the very spirit and disposition of Christ, and consequently, since he must commence somewhere at the foot of the ascending scale the question arises, Is his happiness complete?"

"To the limit of his capacity, I should say; but that he must suffer loss, in comparison with one who has an abundant entrance into heaven, is clear, not only from such passages as 1 Cor. 3:15, and 2 Pet. 1:11, but from reason as well. Jesus' 'many mansions' and Paul's 'seventh heaven' plainly indicate a diversity, and a gradation of blissful conditions. Whoever puts off beginning to live, as Christ explained life, loses ground with every day's delay. Does this view disturb you, Mr. Thornton?"

"On the contrary, it strengthens my faith, because it appeals to my reason and sense of justice. To preach the opposite, that all Christians, when they die, go at once to exactly the same state of bliss, seems to me a most immoral and pernicious doctrine. It makes salvation a mere technical, red-tape affair, in no way dependent on character, or a living, transforming faith. If a death-bed Christian is as good as a lifelong Christian, there is no such thing as growth."

"And we know, Brother Thornton, that growth is as much a law of spiritual life as of natural life. God does not make a great saint out of a great sinner all at once by any sudden, almighty stroke; He converts and grows him, if I may use a southern expression, though we must bear in mind, that with some the conversion is deeper, broader, fuller than with others, and may be so pervasive and all-controlling as to bring about a more wondrous change in a shorter space of time. One person may experience in a day more of the love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, than another in a year, simply because of greater thoroughness of consecration. To illustrate, it takes the master of a vineyard a whole season to 'grow' his grapes before he can express the juice, ferment, and convert it into wine, and even then it requires age to make good wine; but at the marriage feast Jesus compressed the whole process into a few moments. So it is not for us to say how much may be done towards changing a man's character even on a death-bed; but this does not annul the great fact, that every day's delay in beginning a true life is so much time wasted, and whoever wastes time that way commits the most stupendous folly, both as regards happiness here and hereafter."

"Brother Bloomfield, you have helped me so much! and now for another point; for I am greedy for ideas. I believe in Jesus Christ, but not in everything proclaimed as Christianity. I wish to be an honest, unprejudiced searcher after truth, avoiding both credulity and scepticism. Now I

wish to ask on which side does the most danger lie—on that of believing too much, or doubting too much?”

“It is more dangerous, I think, friend Thornton, to doubt than to believe. The darkest state a man can be in, is to doubt everything, and suspect everybody. We must believe in many things we cannot absolutely know.”

“Why must we?”

“Because much truth rests on the authority of persons better informed than ourselves.”

“Please name one.”

“Well, your parents knew you to be their child; but how do you know it?”

“It never occurred to me to doubt it.”

“Just so, friend Thornton; you accepted the truth handed down to you, and that acceptance has been a great blessing both to you and your parents. In loving them as your parents when alive, and their memory as such since death, you have proved that the heart is a better guide in matters of the heart than the head. The heart has its own proofs, which are more satisfactory than those which appeal mainly to the head.”

“You would say that the head or intellect is chiefly to be relied upon in searching for truth, would you not?”

“Yes, in searching, perhaps; but it takes the heart to see it when found, and to feel it, appreciate it, and apply it. Belief in spiritual truth does not rest so much on demonstration as on that intuition which comes from sympathy and

kinship with the truth, its inner harmony and beauty. Jesus said what we know to be true, when He said, Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed. Many reject the truth, because they do not wish it to be true, having no affinity for it, no inner appreciation and spiritual insight into it, and therefore are wanting in the highest attainment of the soul."

"Should anything be accepted as truth, which cannot stand the test of reason?"

"I think not, though some things are beyond our reason at present, as, for example, how trees grow. We only know that they grow. But I think the deepest truths of God make their appeal directly to the spirit of man."

"Without credentials?"

"Without external credentials; they carry conviction in themselves."

"But you would say, would you not, Professor Bloomfield, that every faculty and power of the mind should be exercised to its utmost in the search after truth?"

"Most assuredly. It is a sacred duty, God-given, and if obeyed there would be less opinionated and uncharitable men in the world; for then they would see that their opinions are worth just as much as their reasons for them, and no more. The proper spirit is to be ever willing to go over to the side of truth, the moment the truth is found not to be with you. The honest searcher will seek to know things just as they are. It is a most salutary thing to commit one's self to the

truth, and follow it regardless of consequences, never fearing that truth is in danger, but that he alone is in danger, who clings to his *opinions* with an unsubmissive, unteachable spirit. It is that utter *abandon* to the truth, whether it leads to, or from, one's creed, which gives inspiration and a true uplift to the soul, and is the test of loyalty to God and one's own faculties or personality."

"Then, there are a good many disloyal ones, I fear," said Charley, who had been an attentive listener; "for the most I talk with seem to think as much, at least, of their opinions or creed as they do of the truth."

"Of course," I continued, "a revelation from God presupposes something to be revealed, and, with our utmost study, there will always be mystery enough, even after we have studied thousands and thousands of years in heaven; for the more we know the more we shall see that we do not know; but the man who fails to search with all his might for truth, that he may be able to give a reason for the hope that is within him, is either sinfully negligent of duty, or is too weak-minded to know what duty is."

"Yes, and the man who does not endeavor, conscientiously and prayerfully of course, to clear his sky of the fog of mystery and let in the sunshine of knowledge, has no right to decry or criticise the creed of the man who has so endeavored, in my opinion," said Thornton.

Charley clapped his hands, and Miss Thornton asked :

"Do you not think the spirit of denunciation in the war of creeds arises largely from the tendency to identify truth with one's opinions, thereby precluding that teachableness so essential both to charity of judgment and to advancement?"

"Undoubtedly most people find it one of the hardest and most humiliating tasks of their lives to feel obliged to give up their cherished opinions, and we all know that without teachableness no one can learn. This is why Jesus told His disciples, if they would be great, they must become as a little child. Mary, you remember, who sat teachable at the feet of her Lord, pleased Him more than Martha, who, more assertive, thought she knew what Jesus wanted without asking Him."

"That reminds me of a dispute I once heard, over the respective merits of these two sisters," Charley remarked.

"Which do you think most of, Mr. Light-heart?" asked Miss Horton, laughing to conceal her eagerness.

"As my friend Bloomfield knows, I am very fond of a big feed, and so I should prefer Martha before dinner, and then Mary after dinner," Charley replied, trying to look sober, casting, at the same time, a quizzical glance towards Carrie Horton.

"That's just like a man!" exclaimed Miss Horton with a demure little pout.

Charley drew a long breath with a face express-

ing such an odd mixture of drollery and mystification that a general laugh ensued.

"Which," asked Mr. Thornton, looking at me, "do you think is the leading motive to study, doubt or belief?"

"I should say, belief; for, though we doubt when the foundations of a supposed truth begin to crumble, we still believe there are real foundations somewhere, or we would not study to find them. The sailor drops the lead of inquiry only when he believes himself in hopeful soundings. Belief, also, is courageous and steady, while doubt is uncertain and wavering."

"Yes, but I was thinking of those who believe a dogma to be true merely because old, but I fear even there doubt would not lead them to study; for they are so wed to custom, that they prefer to hug the shore of their own little harbor, though reeking with the polluted waters of tradition, rather than strike out for an independent voyage of discovery on the great ocean of Truth."

"Independent thinkers are few, friend Thornton. That men prefer to be led, rather than lead, you will notice at church, when the congregation sometimes does not rise until the singing of the hymn commences, because waiting one for another. This love of conformity is a good thing where it does not enslave the heart and brain, and shut up one's sympathies and thinking within certain ruts, as it did the Jews."

"But there the trouble lies," said Miss Thornton thoughtfully. "The moment you question

inherited ideas the unprogressives assume an antagonistic attitude, and so render themselves incapable of learning. Only a few days ago a person in my hearing expressed a fear that modern investigations might undermine some of the great truths of Christianity, proving that it was not truth that he loved, but what he had been accustomed to regard as truth, or his version of it. If he loved the truth, he should be glad to see error uprooted and sloughed off, however hard to give up traditional forms."

"Such people are too comfortably settled in their ideas," added Charley, "to like to be disturbed. They are like the sluggard, who lies abed till the sun is high in the heavens, because it requires a little sacrifice to get out of a warm nest."

"Like me for instance," said Miss Horton giggling, and Charley, from sympathy or politeness or some stronger motive, added a remark, which made us all merry for a few minutes, but the discussion was continued a few minutes longer.

"I suppose," said Miss Thornton, "we must hold that bigoted people are conscientious, and though that does not make their views right, is not their conscience their guide as well as ours?"

"Yes," I replied, but there is a question back of that—how came they by their unenlightened conscience? A dark conscience may justify dark deeds."

"Should not a person obey his conscience, good or bad?" she asked again.

"What else can he do? His guilt lies not in obeying his conscience, but perhaps in not obeying it in previous years. His prime duty is to be teachable and learn."

"Is it not enough to be conscientious?" Miss Horton ventured to ask.

"No, not enough. We need to be intelligent, keenly sensitive to truth and goodness, and quick to discern them, and those who will not learn assume a fearful responsibility."

"I suppose," Mr. Thornton remarked, "it is because religious truth is of so grand a character, so highly important, and so sacred, that gross and belittling conceptions of it appear so repulsive. Only think of the hideous religious bigotry that would kill a man to save his soul, so often exhibited towards early Protestantism!"

"Why do you think," Charley asked, "that these perverted consciences have not always been followed studiously and faithfully?"

"There is nothing," I answered, "that shrivels and warps the conscience like disobedience to its still, small voice. Some minds, by continued faithlessness, have become so crooked that no truth can get into them without being twisted beyond recognition; and others are conscientious only in spots and on occasion, and therefore exhibit Quixotic notions of truth and transcendental behavior."

"Goethe tells us," said Miss Thornton, "'tis much easier to meet with error than to find truth; error is on the surface, truth is hidden in great

depths; and the way to seek does not appear to all the world."

"True, Miss Thornton, but people lose their way, because they do not wait and watch for truth in a teachable attitude of mind; it is so easy to dismiss an objectionable or uncomfortable idea without patiently and prayerfully listening to what it has to say. Jesus says, in John 7:17, If any man will (desires to) do His will, he shall know of the doctrine. It is faithful, persistent, unprejudiced, actual seeking that finds."

CHAPTER XXX.

THEODOCIA THORNTON AND MYSELF.

THE large, old-fashioned, cuckoo clock, which stood in a corner of the rear parlor in which we were sitting, struck the hour of eight, and Mr. Thornton said :—

“ It is hard to leave this feast of fat things, but I hope you will excuse me for an hour's absence to look after the interests of poor Polly Durgin. Her husband was of little worth to her while living, but she doubtless feels now, that if he could be restored to her, he would be all that her early imagination had pictured.”

With these words he left, and I remarked to Miss Thornton, “ You have an excellent and true-hearted brother, and I find myself much drawn to him.”

“ Yes,” she replied, “ he is generous, kind, and true. His roughness is all external, like the outside of a bird's nest, which, you know, explains its meaning and beauty to those only who look inside.”

“ Your beautiful illustration, Miss Thornton, reminds me that life in general is not specially attractive, until we find its meaning.”

"That will account, perhaps, for the fact that my life is not very attractive to me."

"Why, Miss Thornton! have you not found the meaning of your life yet?"

She dropped her eyes, and then, as Charley and Miss Horton, who had retired to the front parlor, commenced a duet on the piano, she looked up and answered pensively :

"I am afraid not, but I would like so much to find it."

"I both hope and believe you will ; for, as a writer has well said, Life is so beautiful and symmetrical when you only get hold of the right clue. To quarrel with one's fate is not to understand it ; and it seems to me you have so much to be thankful for, so much to live for !"

"I certainly have no reason to quarrel with mine, so far as money and friends are concerned, and yet I am not content, not happy as I should be, if I knew I was doing the work assigned me to do. Don't you think " (and this she asked with much earnestness) " that it is the privilege of every one to know he or she is fulfilling a mission ? "

"I think one can feel sure of trying to do it. Perhaps you are looking too far off for your mission, not near enough to your home and surroundings. A mission does not necessarily imply some great, or exceptional thing. If it did, how few of us could have a mission ! "

"I have done but little more than manage a household."

"If you have done that so well that you have

made home happy, as I know you have, and inspired your servants to lift up their minds and hearts towards a better life, you have had a mission."

"Do you mean to say, Professor Bloomfield, that there is a God-given mission in doing necessary, every-day duties?"

"I do. There is, or should be, a heavenward end to even the commonest, secular duties. Whether a mission is noble or not depends on the spirit one puts into it. In God's eyes it is not so much what we do, as how we do it."

"Yes, but my work is so transient, so ephemeral!"

"Even a cup of cold water, given to the thirsty with a loving spirit, is an act that can never die. On the other hand, the greatest deed done without soul, without love, perishes, so far as the doer of the deed is concerned. So, Miss Thornton, your work may outlive that of those you now feel inclined to envy."

"How can I do the commonplace things of a housekeeper, Professor Bloomfield, and feel that I am doing an immortal work?"

"Well, you can dignify, and even glorify, house-keeping by looking upon it with the eye of a Christian artist, and love it so much that you cannot but be cheerful and happy, and make others cheerful and happy also. You may turn even the humdrum of every-day life into poetry, though you cannot write it, and feel that you are sweetening life, your own and others, and doing something

towards character-building, which shall last forever. The drudge and slave is one who does her work mechanically, without heart, and thus brings discomfort to herself and those with whom she comes in contact."

"I feel deeply the force and beauty of your words, Professor Bloomfield, and can see the great amount of self-victory required to fill even the humblest sphere aright; but I feel the weight of other and new responsibilities, the responsibilities which accompany the possession of a fair amount of wealth. I wish to do the best possible service with it; and yet I have had the control of my property nearly a year without learning what my mission with it is."

There was a tremor in her voice, and I saw she was feeling more than her words indicated. Too self-depreciating, I thought, and tried to reassure her.

"You have done more good, Miss Thornton, than you think; for I know you have not failed to do the nearest duties, and the little charities, as they have been made known to you, to say nothing of the delightful home you have made for all dwellers under your roof, transient or permanent."

"I have done all these so far as I know, and helped make up deficiencies, and replenish empty treasuries; but I would like to do a more special and distinctive work, where I could see the good effects springing up about me, and know it to be a needed work."

"Have you an idea, Miss Thornton, of the kind of work you feel called upon to do?"

"Only in a nebulous way. I need some one to draw pictures for me. When the right one is portrayed, I should recognize it, I think. What would you do with wealth, Professor Bloomfield?"

"That is a puzzling question, Miss Thornton, for no one really knows what he would do in certain circumstances, until actually placed there; but I have thought, for the past year, especially, if I had wealth, I would do something in the spirit of Robert Falconer. It might not resemble his work very closely, in fact might differ largely from it; but I would do something wherein I could be certain I was doing a practical and needed work neglected by others, and doing it not from worldly ambition. It would be so sweet to know, by demonstration, that it was pure Christian benevolence with no selfish motive in it. Have you read Robert Falconer?"

"I have, and, strange to say, I have been thinking about the book to-day in connection with your suggestion of endowing a professorship of Christian Living, or Character-building, and have queried if the two ideas could not be combined; but I am not able to formulate just what is proper and right for me, as a woman, to do."

"Some one has said that all things come round to him who will but wait."

"Yes, come round to *him*, but will they come round to *her*? It seems to be woman's part to

wait and to watch, in the tragedy of life, till it is too late to do, perhaps, and then die broken-hearted, when she might have been so happy in inaugurating, or helping to inaugurate, and carry forward, the work she felt inwardly called upon to do!"

She spoke almost pathetically, and stopped suddenly, blushing deeply as if having betrayed a secret. I quoted the following lines:

"‘Nothing is late
In the light that shines forever.’"

"Waiting may be a necessary preparation, and, therefore, an essential part of your mission, and, whether you enter on your actual work or not, will count on the credit side of your character in the light that shines forever. Work intended, if hindered by no fault of ours, is work done."

"That is some comfort certainly, yes, everything to one cut off in the midst of preparation; and, yet, how hard it is to be deprived of the happiness, as well as the privilege, which comes from having all the energies of mind and heart employed in a loved and longed-for service!"

"True, but think of the grateful woman, who, not knowing what else she could do, brought simply a box of costly ointment to one she loved. She did what she could, and that was enough in her Lord's eyes. Her holy purpose magnified the little act, and glorified her spirit for time and eternity."

"Yes, Professor Bloomfield, but I am not doing

what I might, what I very much desired, and what I could and would do, if——”

She trembled as she spoke, and left the sentence incomplete, and I noticed, as I had not before, how tender and delicate was the flesh which enwrapt her spirit—so delicate that the latter seemed to shine through it.

“May I ask,” I said, with genuine sympathy, “what hinders you from commencing where the light is clear, and letting the work grow on your hands, as the way opens and duty is revealed to you?”

She hesitated, blushed, and looked for her fan, and rose, and went towards the front parlor as if in search for it, but really, I thought, to make sure what I already knew, that Charley and Miss Horton were not there, but out on the veranda, wholly engrossed in each other's company. As she came back, the following lines came involuntarily into my mind:

“Such harmony in motion, speech and air,
That without fairness she was more than fair.”

She sat down in great agitation, covering her face as much as possible with her fan, which she had picked up, and which she used somewhat vigorously.

“In answer to your question,” she said, at length, “the work seems unsuitable for a woman alone and too rough, especially for me. I need a guide and helper.”

“I should think, Miss Thornton, many men

could be found, who would be only too glad to help carry out your ideas."

"Perhaps so," she said, with downcast eyes, "but the more I have thought of employing a missionary, the more difficulties I have found, because I wish to engage in the work myself."

"Could you not do that?" I asked innocently.

"I do not see my way clear," she answered slowly. "Whoever enters upon the work must be closely identified with it, and—and—with me."

"Yes?" said I, not yet seeing the obstacle in her way. She must have thought me dull; for she raised her dark eyes to mine inquiringly, and then looked down, twirled her fan nervously, and, as I thought, looked beautiful in her perplexity; or was it because, as the poet puts it,—

"All things are beautiful,
Because of something lovelier than themselves,
Which breathes within them, and will never die?"

What that something was, which had transformed and transfigured her, was not apparent to me, unless it was the all-animating mind exalted by a noble purpose struggling anew towards the light, and fast gaining the supreme mastery. She looked almost ethereal as she sat there, the flesh scarcely veiling the sensitive soul, which seemed ready to break through every feature and lineament of her countenance.

"If I were differently constituted," she presently said, "the matter might be more easily arranged. The person I need must not only be

adapted to the work, but to my purpose and ways. He must be more like the sun than the north wind. A rough, steam-engine sort of a person, however good and useful in his place, would not do. The energy I enjoy and believe in, is that which comes through gentleness and refinement, and great elevation of mind. Besides, I want to feel that this person's heart is as deeply in the work, at least, as mine, and so identified with it and with me that what he does I do, my better self sanctioning every movement of his. I want to have so much confidence, and something akin to pride in him, as my spiritual interpreter and representative, that, whether I am in this world or the next, I shall know that the work is going on better than I could execute or devise myself. In fact, I want to feel that I, in my better moods, and most exalted ideals of love and duty, am working through him and by him—in short, that we are one in mind and heart, in thought and purpose, so that I could take more comfort in his receiving even heavenly honors, as the better expression of my personality, than I could in receiving them myself."

As she ceased speaking, her face was almost glorious to behold, having evidently been carried beyond herself by her mental pictures, and as she came back to self-consciousness, her face became covered with blushes.

"Do you expect to find such a person in this imperfect world?" I asked, with mingled perplexity and deep interest.

"Not again," she answered with a little unconscious sigh.

"Then you have met him?" I asked with as much of an exclamation-point in my voice, perhaps, as of interrogation.

The color came and went in her fair cheeks before the reply came, slowly, modestly, but earnestly :

"Yes, I have met one, and only one, in all my life, who comes up to my ideal, and he goes just enough beyond it to make it round, full, complete."

"Is it possible?" I said in great astonishment. "And does he know of your great esteem?"

"I think not," she replied softly and with downcast eyes.

"Why do you not tell him?" was my next question.

"Because," she answered with a faint smile, "it is not the custom for a lady to tell a gentleman what she thinks of him before she knows what he thinks of her."

"True, it is not the custom, but your position, wealth, and noble life-plan give you an advantage over custom, to say nothing of the right of mere custom to seal the lips and blast the life of any woman."

Her eyes had a new light in them as she looked up and asked :

"Would a man respect a woman who laid bare her mind and heart to him unasked?"

"Respect! If he failed to, he certainly would

not be entitled to your respect, much less anything more."

"I have heard," she said, "that Dr. —, a noted preacher of Boston, sent this sharp answer to a lady, who had offered him her money with her hand and heart: 'Give your heart to the Lord, your money to the church, and your hand to the man who asks it.'"

"Yes, Miss Thornton, I have heard that story, and I confess I have never thought so well of him since, though it may be claimed, in apology, that he belonged to the old school of ideas on that point, and, further, that she really had no heart to give, or that the circumstances might have been provoking; but I cannot conceive how a real gentleman can treat harshly the admiration or devotion of a true woman. He is certainly not my idea of a man who could be otherwise than considerate and kindly compassionate, even where unable to reciprocate either affection or admiration."

"Your words only confirm what I believed before, that you could not be otherwise than appreciative and thoughtful for others; but even you, Professor Bloomfield, do not know what effect a declaration of love would have on you."

She looked at me inquiringly, with a sweet, pathetic smile, and then continued:

"While it may be the custom of queens to propose to their intended consorts, and while it may be proper for ladies of lower stations in life, the question of love is so vital, so awfully sacred,

I dare not say what may be a fatal word to all my plans."

"You have perfect confidence in him?"

"Yes," she answered with cheeks aglow, "but I fear to break the charm of uncertainty. So long as I do not break the secret, I may hope, with whatever is not wrongly akin to silent worship, that if we cannot devise and plan together, I may induce him to take my work upon himself and carry it forward alone or with some more fitting companion. If he is happy, I shall try to be content. If I knew the telling would not substitute self-consciousness in place of freedom in our social and, I hope, future business relations, or in any way mar the pleasure of true friendship, and thus the success of my life-plan, there should not be a corner of my mind or heart that I would not reveal to him, though I have not known him long by clock-time—years, however, by heart-throbs."

That last expression recalled vividly the wonderful similarity of my own experience in the society of Ethel Blentwood, and my sympathies were much moved. She went on :

"You have my confidence so thoroughly, Prof. Bloomfield, it will lighten the burden of tumultuous feeling, which has become oppressive for want of expression, if I tell you more. The first time I met this man he impressed me as thoroughly honest, true and good, on whom one could lean without the shadow of a doubt or misgiving, and all I learned of him through friends only con-

firmed my faith and increased my admiration, and lately, having been thrown more into his company, his lovable disposition and congenial ways have won me, and won me until I have waked up to the consciousness that I love him with all the intensity of my being. I should not have allowed my heart to go out to one who had not asked my love, but, fight against it as I might, I could not help it; and my mission waits. Every man who has sought me has disclosed some coarseness or narrowness of mind, which has made me uncomfortable. Though it is said that the tough rind may cover something soft within, such a rind gives me too much pain to enjoy the softness. But this man, who has not sought me, soothes and comforts me by his very presence, flooding all my sensibilities like a congenial sunshine ushering in a sweet June morning. Besides, he draws all my goodness to the top and puts me at my best, and I am sure, in his presence, I should be kept there, growing better and nobler as time wore away. And then, again, his conversation is so helpful! I could listen to him without a thought of food, as Mary did at the feet of One she also loved."

"Miss Thornton!" I exclaimed, half rising in my astonishment, "such love as yours is worth more to any true man than all the gold and silver in the world! It is not difficult to find a wife who may give an easy-going affection, but such fervid, all-controlling, worshipful devotion is a rare and priceless gift, for which any man would do well

to sacrifice everything except loyalty to God and his own conscience. Let two persons mutually qualified give each to the other such a love as that, and what a heaven! I can only wonder who can be so fortunate as to command such devotion, and from one so noble as yourself. I have never met but one person heretofore worthy of so great admiration and love, and that person is a woman, and to be frank with you as you have been with me, do you know that you have almost exactly described my estimate of her and my present attitude towards her. I cannot but think what an infinite blessing it would be to have all the treasures of hope and reverence and love lying in her great and pure soul, given to me as freely and fully as you give those lying in you to the man of your choice! But I am unworthy of so great a love from so great a source. She is too good for me to hope, and yet, strange to say, I do hope—— Miss Thornton! what is the matter?" I exclaimed in the midst of my sentence, springing towards her, as her head fell back, pale and lifeless.

"Are you faint? What can I do for you?"

A low murmur was all the response I got, and, placing her quickly on a sofa, and snatching a goblet of water near at hand, I bathed her face and temples, and was on the point of rushing out to find a servant, who might know better than I what to do, when she revived somewhat and opened her eyes with a half-conscious smile, so feeble, yet so sweet and winsome, that, had I

been a girl, I should have kissed her, and came very near it as it was! That pathetic look! I shall never forget it.

"You dear girl! Am I doing all that is necessary?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes," she faintly whispered, almost inarticulately, and closed her eyes, like one in the peaceful enjoyment of needed rest, satisfied that she was being cared for. Sensitive soul! I thought, needing a very delicate, protecting love to shield her from the rough contact of a blustering world.

When able to sit up, she apologized by saying, "I hope you will excuse this episode; I find I am not strong lately, and then again," she added, trying bravely to smile, as if she would jest, "it may have been a little too hard for me to look into the happiness you were picturing, as lost to me."

"No, not lost," I said, hopefully. "You will find it, if that man, you delight to honor, ever learns, as learn he must, if you will give me any clue with which to identify him, what an appreciative, loyal prize he has in you."

"Impossible!" she said, her eyes moistening.

"Impossible?" I repeated. "That is a harsh word."

"Yes," she answered, with a suppressed sigh, "but, strange as it may appear to you, the truth has suddenly flashed upon me like a revelation, that his heart belongs to another. While you were speaking, a sentence, uttered by him, came

into my mind, revealing that fact but too plainly. Until that moment, I had a floating, glimmering hope of an active, personal mission for good ; but from this hour dates the death of all that."

She covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and sobbed convulsively. My sympathies were so aroused I could not speak for a moment, and could only express them by pressing her unemployed hand. As soon as the lump in my throat would allow, I said :

" I am glad you can cry, Miss Thornton ; you will feel better for it. The pent-up heart can only find relief by expression. Let not my presence restrain in the least the flow of tears ; for there is, perhaps, no one, not even the one you love, who is in just the condition to sympathize with you so thoroughly as I am. I hope, however," I added, as she grew calm, and her thankful eyes met mine, " that your revelation is not final. His love for another may be a mere fancy, and when he knows of the wealth of affection he has in you, his heart may fly from that other to you in spite of himself, and with the other's consent."

" That cannot be," she replied, gravely ; " for his judgment is too correct to mistake, and his heart too loyal to forsake the nest it has made and warmed in the breast of another ; and I cannot believe any girl, good enough to command his love, can fail to cling to him till death. Let your own experience convince you, Professor Bloomfield. You could not withdraw your heart

from the one you love, although not quite certain that your feelings are reciprocated."

"Too true, Miss Thornton, my affections must go on without wavering, steady to the home they seek, unless they find the door shut against them, and are turned away homeless."

"That is what I knew you would say, Professor Bloomfield, and I esteem you for the frankness with which you assert it."

I had no suspicion who the loved one was, and asked, "Am I to infer, then, that you have given up all expectations of having your affections met?"

"Yes, completely."

"Does the thought make you miserable?"

"Not now. The pang from loss of hope was sharp, cutting like a knife until all selfishness died within me, and now I am beginning to find a pleasure in giving up; and I shall be happy in his happiness and usefulness, to both of which I hope to contribute, and that will be a great comfort to me."

"Yours is a generous and noble nature, Miss Thornton, and I cannot but feel that that man's loss, whoever he is, is greater than yours. You are worthy of the best man living, and if the one you love is lost to you, there must be another somewhere as good and true, and probably better calculated to meet your wants, and when Providence sends him, you will love again."

"Can the full-blown rose shut up and be a bud again?"

"No, Miss Thornton, but the water-lily shuts up, when the day leaves it to darkness and sleep, and when another new day comes, it is won open again to gladden the beholder with a loveliness all its own, fresh and beautiful as before."

"I know what you say comes from the kindness of your heart, Professor Bloomfield, but the thought is distasteful to me. I have not the slightest hope, or wish, to love again."

"Forgive my blundering. All I can say, then, is, that it is better to be a rose than always a bud—in other words, better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all."

"I think I understand your meaning, and am content, though, loving the good, my love is not lost. I am richer and better for having found, esteemed, and loved a perfect human ideal; it makes heaven seem nearer, and the ultimate triumph of good more possible. When it flashed upon me that we could never work side by side as one, I felt that death, in its worst form, had come to me; but in the past hour I have lived years! and God has shown me that it is even better as it is. If I am not to last long, it will be easier, and interfere less with his mission, to part as we are, than if our relations were something nearer and dearer than friendship. Now, all I ask is, that I may live long enough to discharge my obligations for the property at my disposal, and then I will go willingly, satisfied that he will be happy in the love of another, and probably more useful; and the thought that I may be of

some secret service to him and the great Over-Soul, gives me unspeakable delight. It is so much more happiness than I deserve!"

"Miss Thornton," I said, with much feeling, "there is a heavenly light in your countenance, which convinces me that you have found the joy that lies in self-sacrifice."

"Yes," she answered, with sweet, tender pathos, and a depth of holy peace looking out from under her eyelashes, "I am unexpectedly and greatly blest in giving up. I see now, clearly, that is what life means to me, and I know that it is not only blessed to give, but blessed to give up. Truly, all things work together for good to them that love God."

"How about your life-plan?"

"I am convinced God will permit me to so leave it, that it will be carried out better by another than by myself."

"Would you not love to see your work growing up under your own eyes?"

"That would be very pleasant in certain circumstances; but God knows His own business best, and I am content to see at last what my mission is, and to do it."

"You have already accomplished a mission of good to me, Miss Thornton, and if the occasion comes to require it, as it may, I shall try hard to imitate your beautiful example of Christian resignation. But really, Miss Thornton, is there any clear foundation for your belief in a short life?"

"It is a case of sudden intuition, or revelation, better felt than explained, and I see the hand of Providence quite plainly making the way easy for me." She spoke with an expression of rapturous enthusiasm softened by a pathetic sweetness of voice.

"The world can illy afford to lose you, and now that we have become so well acquainted, and I am so much interested in you, I cannot bear the thought. Do you know that you remind me in many ways of one I have thought the very best in the world?"

"By way of contrast?" she asked, smiling.

"No, by similarity. Spiritually and in frankness and transparency of motive you are both at one. There is also, in common with you both, a timidity, a sensitive delicacy, a clinging tenderness, and yet, a practical common-sense, coupled with a depth and strength of principle, which would not slacken the performance of any clear duty, however disagreeable."

"You do me great honor, and I am very, very grateful for your appreciation. I have talked freely beyond my intention, because—because—well, one thing, because you are one of the few men with whom a woman can feel perfectly free, and confidential, without the least admixture of doubt, or fear of being misunderstood." And then she added, with a touch of girlish animation, "I am glad I have talked, and now shall we not be strong friends as long as we live?"

She extended her lily-white hand rather play-

fully for my pledge, and, grasping it in both hands, I answered cordially :

“ If it rests with me, we will most certainly, and I shall count it one of the greatest privileges of my life.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

CARRIE HORTON AND CHARLEY.

AT this point in our conversation, Mr. Thornton entered the room, and was soon followed by Charley Lightheart and Carrie Horton. The latter saucy-eyed, full of mirthful exuberance, filled the room with the noisy effervescence of her pleasure, and put an end to all seriousness. Charley, too, with his explosive warmth of heart and love of fun, was soon aroused, and filled the social air, now with fleecy crystals of wit, and now with iridescent sparkles of mock sentiment, till every one was shaking with irrepressible laughter.

It was late before Miss Horton arose to go, and, when she did, I noticed she had a lithe figure and a buoyant step, and I tried to fathom the mystery of Charley's liking for her. She was not handsome, or possessed of much depth of mind, but she had a fairly attractive face, that could look very good and innocent, and a vivacity of expression, and piquant gesture and snap of the eyes, which were stimulating to a mind like Charley's, freeing him from that natural restraint he felt in the presence of quiet, reserved ladies.

Although she could not talk on any subject requiring more than superficial thought, she was quick to catch any occult meaning, in conversation, which she could turn into her familiar line of favorite topics, where she felt at home; and, while she was waiting and watching to do this, she gave the impression of listening intelligently, and that she only turned the conversation from an irrepressible love of the unexpected and ridiculous.

Charley accompanied her home, only a short distance away, which, however, he made long by either walking very slow, or taking a good deal of time in saying good-bye on the door-step. When he returned, after a few jests at his expense, we retired for the night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BREAKFAST.

THE next morning was cloudy and cold for the season, and the open fire in the dining-room was a cheering and welcome sight.

"An open fire is a means of grace in weather like this," I said, after table manners were over, preliminary to our morning meal. "It not only takes the chill from the nerves, but imparts its warmth and glow to the spirit."

"A hint for good housekeeping, and domestic tranquillity," Charley remarked, looking up slyly.

"You think it might often prevent domestic quarrels, I suppose, Mr. Lightheart," observed Miss Thornton, and then added archly, "The responsibility in such matters rests wholly with the lady, of course, and not at all with the lord!"

"Certainly," Charley answered soberly; "if I am ever a domestic bear, it will be because of my wife's mismanagement of me. If she allows the damp weather to get into my disposition by neglecting the fire-place, *et cetera*, it, of course, will be her fault, for it will be her duty to see that I am always kept serene and in a blissful mood."

I was glad to see Miss Thornton laugh, and

therefore asked, "When there is no one to build the fire except yourself, Charley, what will prevent the appearance of the domestic bear?"

"That question," answered Charley, trying to blush, "puts me into the warm weather; for it is a calorific reflection on my docility and native loveliness of disposition. Of course, if my wife has no servant to order, she must order me to build the fire. I shall always be obedient where I see that she is weatherwise, and watching to provide against thermal disturbances likely to eventuate in a storm!"

He heaved a long-drawn sigh, and added, "To build a fire would be pretty work, were it not for the incongruous ashes! Why the Creator should give to the beautiful flame so disagreeable a concomitant is beyond me! Going to war, and sacrificing one's self for one's country is nothing to the sacrifice of the finer and more delicate feelings required in emptying ashes! In the former case the body is patriotically, and beautifully, killed, but, in the latter, the tender sensibilities are murdered! And yet, so long as my wife manages me properly, my manly bosom will never entertain a thought of rebellion, and I hope this fact will inspire you all with some appreciation of my wondrous docility."

"You need give us no other proof," asserted Thornton. "Ashes are a nuisance, from which we hope electricity may sometime free us."

"Nuisance is no word for them," Charley declared scornfully. "To illustrate, you turn down

the ash-pan and run, but the ashes go for you and pass by, and when you think you have escaped, a gust of wind brings them back in your face, eddying and whirling about you, and when at last you can see and breathe, you extend your arms diagonally, stoop over and look at yourself, and then you want to say Gorry, but you will not belittle yourself by giving way to uneducated temper. You try to feel amiable, but there you are with your neat appearance all gone, and your dignity utterly squelched! Now, whether there is any home happiness for the rest of that day depends on the sensitive thoughtfulness and affectionate skill of the wife. This is her supreme moment!"

"Do tell us particularly just what she should do," said Miss Thornton much entertained.

"Well," replied Charley sedately, "I am always glad to impart my superior knowledge, and will say, if she meets her lord with loving gladness, as if he had been gone months instead of minutes, dances about him, calling him pet names, and kisses him, and then comes back for one more as she starts off for her work again, domestic felicity is made secure; but if she is thoughtless, and does nothing to revive his drooping spirits, the dying embers go on dying, and marital felicity perishes."

"I hope you will excuse me, Professor Bloomfield," said Mr. Thornton at the first lull in the conversation, "if I ask the clearing up of a Biblical difficulty?"

"Certainly," I replied, "I shall be only too glad to assist you as far as I myself have got out of the woods."

"What ! you have difficulties ?"

"Many of them."

"Well," continued Mr. Thornton both surprised and relieved, "it is some comfort to know that. Coming home from poor Polly Durgin's last night I got to thinking of the raising of the widow's son, and it struck me as a hardship, instead of a kindness, to call him back to life, after he had got through with the suffering attendant upon sickness and death, to pass through it all again."

"It never occurred to me that he must die again," Miss Thornton exclaimed.

"Strange I had not thought of that either," added Charley.

"We can conceive," I said, as they all looked to me, "that the object-lesson might be worth all the pains of another death, and that the extension of preparatory time might be of inestimable value to others, as well as to the son ; but I like to think of it as a mark of sympathy not only for our sorrowing humanity in the breaking up of family ties (as when Jesus wept with Mary and Martha at the tomb of their brother), but for the holier tears of a mother widowed and lonely, and, therefore, as a divine tribute to motherhood—a declaration in action of the service due from child to parent."

"I thank you for that thought ; I like it," said

Thornton emphatically. His voice trembled a little as he added, "A mother's tears are sacred if anything is in this world."

"Your remark," I continued, "finds a responsive echo in all our hearts, and gives emphasis to what I was about to add, that Jesus reached the higher nature of man through some benefit to the lower, bringing the truth into direct contact with the mind by first getting body and mind into the right condition to receive it."

"That reminds me," Miss Thornton said, "to ask how you would apply the Christ idea to the lower classes?"

"I would live among them, at least part of the time, dress neatly but plainly, be interested in all their little gettings-on in life, and, if they were suffering in body, mind, or estate, relieve them, and then bring home the truth."

"That would require great self-denial in one who loves nice surroundings," said Mr. Thornton, thoughtfully.

"Yes, but what is a Christian good for who cannot practice self-denial? Besides, nothing valuable can be accomplished without it. And yet, again, in self-denial, with the right motive, lies the purest and most abiding joy."

"I fear I should find it too hard to give up a fine home, and go down and live among rough, unappreciating people, even for the sake of helping them."

"It may not be your duty, Mr. Thornton, personally, but it is somebody's duty; and if I

had the means, I should burn to undertake a work where I could walk so clearly in the footsteps of One whose moral heroism and loveliness of spirit fill me at times with the profoundest enthusiasm." A wistful look was in the eyes of Miss Thornton, as they met mine, and tears were starting from their fountains; and I hastened to add, "This idea of commencing with people where you find them is suggestive also of the proper method of instruction anywhere, even of sermonizing to a cultured people."

"That's right," said Charley, "give us a course on homiletics, so I may know how to supply the defects of dull sermons when I have to listen to them."

"Please go on, Professor Bloomfield," urged Thornton.

"I was only thinking that the common method, and perhaps the most logical, too, is to commence inward with principle, and work outward to conduct, and, therefore, too far off from the auditors to get their immediate attention, leaving some without sufficient interest to get aboard the train of thought; whereas, Jesus commenced outward with what was familiar and interesting to his hearers, and worked inward, thereby easily carrying them with him, and letting them go away with their last thoughts on the springs of conduct or convictions of duty, which is a great point gained."

"That recalls the pictures we have," said Miss Thornton, "of Jesus drawing the attention of his

hearers to the lilies of the field and the sparrows before their very eyes, and, by means of them, inward to a conviction of God's providential care over all his creatures."

"In all his parables, and even in his miracles," I added, "he led them from the outside fact to the inside fact—from the material and familiar to the immaterial and spiritual."

"If homiletical professors and all who run the theological mills taught the Nazarene method, I think we should have more interesting preachers," said Charley with the sparkle of mingled merriment and earnestness in his eyes.

"Better still," added Thornton with some spirit, "if the gospel mills, as you call them, were abolished altogether."

"Why so, Thede?" asked his sister.

"Because, Theo, the pulpit might then say something new and interesting, and the religious world be relieved of its present unprogressive, dull monotony. Theological seminaries are denominational, and both create and perpetuate ruts, and, so, pervert the divine plan of original, independent, individual thinking and method. They lead men to look at truth for the sake of party or sect, and not from the love of it. There is no encouragement to think, and every inducement not to think, except along denominational lines. Is not that so, Professor?"

"It is true," I responded, "that our theological seminaries are in a measure open to the objection you mention. Some preachers are undoubtedly

injured by a theological course, being spoiled for what they might have been, and not made into what the seminaries would build them; and yet——”

“But just think, Mr. Bloomfield, (When excited it was simply “Mr.”, at most other times “Professor”), these seminaries are sectarian, and all the teachers are chosen to think one way, with little or no latitude; and if one is independent enough to take a broader view, and, in his larger sweep finds new ideas outside of the prescribed limits, and teaches them, he is at once bounced, as the phrase is. How can there be any progress under such a system? It is high time people stopped thinking in platoons and phalanxes, or denominations, and began to think as individuals, standing alone in the glory and power of a personal responsibility.”

The last sentence was spoken with much warmth, and I thought it best to simply ask:—

“Mr. Thornton, how would you remedy the defects of the present system of theological instruction?”

“I would either dump these schools into the Back Bay, Mr. Bloomfield, or introduce into them untrammelled teachers of every denomination, and, perhaps, one good, honest, common-sense sceptic to sharpen their wits, and keep their heads clear of all nonsense, and, by broad, healthy discussion, free them from the stagnation and death of partisan and antiquated knowledge sealed and delivered in iron-bound creeds.”

"A good idea, Mr. Thornton, but before it can be materialized men must need be better, and larger every way than now."

"You believe, then, in denominations and creeds?"

"I think at present our religious liberties are safer with many denominations than with one. Unless Protestant human nature is different from Roman Catholic human nature, I would not dare to trust even my own church without the check of opposing denominations and beliefs."

"There is something in that, I admit; but my objection to creeds is, that those who subscribe to them take a partisan view of truth, and keep their minds set in a defensive, instead of a teachable attitude."

"There, indeed, is where the great danger of all parties and creeds lies. But of course every one has a creed, something he believes, or he would have nothing on which to stand, no fulcrum over which to pry, and give his thoughts a higher range."

"Very true, Mr. Bloomfield, but how is one to get out of an iron-bound creed? He might as well try to lift himself over a fence by his boot-straps."

"I believe, Brother Thornton, that a man who imprisons his mind in an iron-bound creed is verily guilty before God and man."

"What, then, can the subscriber to a written creed do?"

"He should be just as conscientiously free as the man with only an unwritten creed, and en-

large it as he outgrows it ; as the written constitution of the United States has been enlarged by being pulled here, and patched there, till, like a country-boy's coat, the original is nearly out of sight."

"Well, Professor Bloomfield," with a laugh which went round the table, "I could manage to get along with your interpretation and use of creeds ; but the trouble is, so many make a nest of their creed, and lie in it as a finality, and only snarl at you if you attempt to show them something not in their nest."

"Too true, and, if they do not snarl, they pity you that you are not tucked in as warmly as they ; but might not such persons settle down into something as stationary without, as with, a written creed?"

"Possibly ; but it is the ministry, and those who ought to know better, who are to blame for the immobility of church creeds. Oh ! it is a crime to deprive men of the necessity of thinking ; and shame on the man who, for the sake of denominational standing, or for his bread and butter, even will sell his birthright to receive and proclaim all the truth God gives him !"

"Amen to that, friend Thornton, but are you not fighting a man of straw?"

"God knows I wish I were!" He spoke sorrowfully, pausing, and then with increasing indignation went on. "Why, only recently a well-known theological professor admitted, to friends of mine, that there should be a restatement of

theological doctrine. The times, he said, required it, and the interests of truth demanded it. He went so far as to give his approval of such a statement drawn up by a conscientious and rising pastor of his own faith. Other religious teachers and leaders gave their unqualified approval, and there was a great scramble among certain religious editors for the privilege of first publishing it to the world. When published, however, a cry went up everywhere from the babes in the woods, that they had the faith once delivered to the saints, and wanted no new theology! Then the frightened theological Professor went to the author, and said that on further reflection he could not approve of the restatement, many of the other original adherents saying about the same; leaving the honest author to fight for truth almost single-handed. Oh! this quailing before men, fearing the loss of position more than dishonesty before God, is not leaving all to follow the truth!"

"All I can say is, brother Thornton, if there are such craven religious teachers, so cowardly, so recreant to their trusts, as to teach, in part even, what they do not believe, it is one of the saddest thoughts in the religious history of this hopeful nineteenth century. It makes me sick to think such a thing possible!"

"Possible! Why—Excuse me." He disappeared, bringing back copies of a religious paper published in Boston. "Here is something nearer home, which shows that some ministers, at least, don't want the truth proclaimed, and that religious

teachers and editors can be frightened from the duty of giving it to them. A series of interpolated Scripture texts has appeared from week to week by a professor in a theological seminary, until, at length, communications poured in, crying, 'Save the Bible! It is time to cry a halt!' Since then I have looked in vain for any more interpolated Scripture texts in that paper. Are these people afraid of the truth?"

"They are timid, brother Thornton, and, perhaps, afraid to trust the people."

"Then they ought not to blame the Romish priests for not trusting the Bible in the hands of the ignorant. I tell you, good brother, this lack of confidence in the truth, and in the people, is more than a mistake, it is a crime! This resting on a perhaps, instead of digging for the rock-bottom truth, is unaccountable to me."

"I am heartily with you, brother Thornton, but we must remember that Christianity has to deal with pretty poor material, some of it low-down, weak, and awfully twisted, and it takes time to lift it up and straighten it. To some people whatever is old and familiar becomes sacred, and they prefer to be deceived, almost, than to be deprived of it. And then, again, many are apparently controlled wholly by their surroundings—kept out of the Church by them, and swept in by them, and take their faith from them, it is so much easier to be borne along by forces outside of them, and not have to lift their heads and breast the popular current!"

“Delightfully happy persons!” broke in Charley, filling his goblet with fresh milk from a pitcher by his side. “They have accommodating consciences like this liquid, which always takes the shape of the vessel holding it. I find a pliable conscience a very convenient thing to have about one, it is so delicious to do wrong semi-occasionally!” This turned the conversation into lighter channels, which was what Charley desired.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TEARFUL FAREWELL.

AFTER breakfast we read from three different translations, and one Greek Testament which I always carried with me, the twentieth chapter of Acts, descriptive of the touching separation of Paul from the elders of the Ephesian Church, that chapter occurring as a coincident, and not by design, in the regular course of my Scripture reading. As we read in turn each voice had a note of tenderness; and, when Charley read how "They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more," his utterance became choked, Thornton cleared his throat, and Miss Thornton covered her eyes with her handkerchief. I, too, was deeply moved, and found it difficult to go on with the service.

Why we should have so much feeling on this separation morn is not easily explained. Was it prophetic that we should not all meet again? Or is there a subtle cord of sympathy communicating with kindred spirits, as by an electric wire, whatever of keen emotion there may be in one loving heart, though outwardly unindexed? One thing was certain, that, next to the Blentwoods, this

home of Theodore and Theodocia Thornton was the pleasantest I ever enjoyed—Theodore a little brusque in his manner, but kind and honest, and Theodocia every inch a woman of refinement, great delicacy, and yet, great strength of feeling, frank, confiding, modest without prudery, tender, unconventional, and innocent as a child. I had in my heart of hearts a very strong friendship for both of them.

Theodocia reminded me of Ethel Blentwood in that they had similar rallying points of faith and courage, the same conscientious love of truth, the same frank, loving disposition and purity of purpose, were similar in height, and in the deep, luminous expression of their eyes. Both were graceful in movement and figure, but Ethel had more roundness of contour, a more elastic step, more vivacity and varied expression of countenance, a more aggressive warmth and joyousness of temperament, at the same time more of self-reliance, self-poise and self-control.

One appealed to you from her sweet, childlike dependence, the other from her more positive and winning cordiality. One roused your manliness and devotion, the other inspired you with the noblest impulses and activities. Both were lovely and lovable, and, in some circumstances, it might have been hard to choose between them. Theodocia had that vine-like, twining disposition, which appeals so strongly to every man, and it seemed a pity that her great affection could not have the sunshine of encouragement to grow up

about the man she loved. What oak, I thought, would not be improved by such a vine!

But whatever the cause, when we arose from our devotions, mine, I knew, was not the only face suffused with tears. Thornton looked out of the window, Charley fumbled a book, and Theodocia went, deeply agitated, from the room. I found her afterwards half reclining in a large easy-chair, screened behind the ample draperies of the bay-window. Her hands hung limp by her side, from one of which her handkerchief was slipping away, and from her half-closed eyes there were traces of fallen tears.

The whole picture was so touching, so pathetic, that, without knowing what I did, but wishing to do something, I raised her head upon my left arm and passed the other hand over her temples. It was entirely the impulse of unstudied sympathy. She did not move, however; but a slight thrill went through her frame, the color came to her cheeks, and, as I began to feel alarmed, she opened her eyes, and smiled at me through her recurring tears. It was like the breaking out of a rainbow through the drops of a clearing shower.

"Oh!" she said, "I have had such a beautiful vision, and must have been asleep when you came to me. I was in heaven, and, seeing you coming, I hurried back, but think you got here first."

"It was too bad in me to bring you down out of heaven, but I didn't wish you to go there to stay just yet," I said, trying to laugh.

"Oh, I was glad to come," she explained, "for

I thought I wanted to say something to you. It was all so wonderful! and so very real! Such bright and glorious spirits! and they, the few near me, seemed to know by sympathetic intuition, what my errand was, and to enjoy with me my sanguine hopes. You will promise? I know you will."

"Am I to promise without knowing what?"

"It is a sacred trust, which I commission you to perform, the details of which I will leave under seal to be opened immediately after my burial."

"Oh, don't talk of burial! Miss Thornton; you may outlive me many years."

"If I do, you will be released from your promise. If within your power, will you accept the trust?"

"Must I promise without further light?"

"Yes, if your confidence in me is sufficient."

I hesitated from a natural repugnance to a step so utterly in the dark, where a thousand contingencies might change the whole aspect of things, and render the fulfilment of a promise a very delicate and difficult matter of conscience, but I said:—

"I can trust you, Miss Thornton, to give me no unjust task, and, therefore, I promise to do what you wish, limited only by my ability."

"I knew you would; the angels whispered it, and looked glad as I left them; and now let us seal the compact." Placing a Bible in my hands, and clasping it in hers also, she added, "We will consider *her* hands on this book, if you like, so as

to make this a possible tripartite agreement; and now, in the circumstances, with our hands on the Bible, and in the presence of two worlds, I think we are capable of sealing it with a—a—holy—”

There was an unworldly, spiritual look and a question in her eyes, as she hesitated, and to save her the embarrassing word I bowed my head, and the strange compact, or possible tripartite agreement, as she called it, was solemnly and sacredly sealed. She looked at me as if she saw into my very soul, and then, with a smile more angelic than earthly, said:

“I shall not die untimely, and I am very grateful, and very happy.”

She gave me her hand, and I asked, “Shall we say good-bye now?”

“It might as well be here,” she answered, “if you will excuse the seeming impoliteness; for I am exceedingly weak this morning.”

I pressed her hand, and, with thanks for her friendly hospitality, and a God bless you, together with a few comforting words, cut short by a lump in my throat, I rushed out upon the piazza, where I was soon joined by Charley and Mr. Thornton, the latter with a well-filled lunch-basket in his hand.

We had scarcely started for the shore before a message came for Mr. Thornton, and Charley and I went on alone. When we turned for a last look at the house, Thornton waved his hat from the piazza, and a white handkerchief fluttered from the open bay window, where I had left Theodocia.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LOVE AND PHILOSOPHY.

WE were soon moving downstream in the middle of the current, each occupied with his own reflections. What I thought of my strange experience may better be imagined than expressed. I naturally queried whether Theodocia would select Ethel as my ideal of a woman, or I the man of Theodocia's choice, and why our affections should pass each other, when, with a common object and her ample means, we could do the glorious work I longed for; and I wondered whether love had any common-sense in it anyway. But Ethel held the throne in my heart, and God, I thought, would solve the problem some way; and in sheer reaction from the too serious strain I began to rally Charley from his revery on his attachment to Carrie Horton.

"Physician, heal thyself," he remonstrated.

"Good medical advice," I acknowledged, "which I fear you cannot take, because you exhausted all your little pills on me when we were leaving the Blentwood shore, but which I will now proceed to pay back to you, in lieu of coin, for your professional services:

"Charley Lightheart, my boy, snap the chains

of enslavement which Carrie Horton has wound about your too willing neck. Be free ! Stand up with St. Paul and me on the sublime heights of female disenchantment ! Wash away the films which girlish blandishments have cast over your eyes ! Give your affections a little fresh air ! Ensmall not yourself, my boy ! Allow not your sympathies to be hedged about by matrimonial intentions ! Be enlarged, and love the whole world ! Soar, my boy, soar on the wings of a boundless aspiration ! ”

This harangue had its effect, and Charley, raising himself and his hat with great and solemn dignity, said :—

“ Allow me to inform your highness that to love Carrie Horton enlarges a man, and does not hedge in his sympathies. She is a cosmos, and, therefore, whoever loves her loves the world ! She sparkles with all the brilliancy of a Kohinoor, more beautiful is she than the rose, sweeter than the pink, lovelier than the lily. In short, she is Carrie Horton, and in these words I exhaust the English language ! ”

He sat down with the air of one who felt supremely satisfied with himself. To help on his self-complacency, which I enjoyed immensely, especially the manner of it, I said :

“ Your weighty arguments have silenced the guns of opposition. I confess myself squelched.”

Charley smote upon his breast, and, bowing slowly, as if agitated by his emotions, gravely responded :

"Your magnanimity touches my heart! I, too, am conquered; but neither you nor I, great souls that we are, can take advantage of our victory! I confess that Carrie Horton is not so great intellectually as Ethel Blentwood, and may not have so high a purpose in life—which fact will enable me to commit any little sins, which are sweet to me, unmolested, and that is an inestimable boon! I need, you know, just the tiniest little devil in my wife to keep up a happy equilibrium, or balance, of marital forces, and Carrie has one, I think, about the right size. She is deliciously lively. In fact I may say, without qualification, she is lively. She plays lively, sings lively, talks lively, laughs lively, and loves lively. She is not the girl to get into the dumps, and sit against the north side of a tombstone on a cold moonlight night. She likes the warmth and the sunshine, and the buttered side of the world's bread, and knows which side that is; and we shall unitedly seek, not for the first seats in the universe, but for the softest and pleasantest, where we shall be fanned by the balmiest breezes, and the fragrance of life is sweetest. In a word, we shall live on the very mountain-top of wedded felicity equally delicious every day in the week!"

"But suppose an unlooked-for domestic breeze blow you off your pinnacle of glory?"

"Then I will scramble up again."

"Good! but suppose the next breeze proves a squall, and it is repeated faster than you can

scramble up, and you become so sore you find it difficult to climb, and discover when too late (O, the horrors of such a discovery!) that your confidence was grounded in ignorance of the new forces and changed thermal conditions of married life?"

"Do you mean to say that my Carrie can become a nimbiferous cyclone, perpetual or intermittent?—my Carrie, who is always as balmy, and as bright, and as sweet as a June morning!"

"A June morning she may be in the halcyon days of courtship, with nothing but sunshine between her and you, but——"

"Are you insinuating (interrupting, and pounding the boat with his fist) that I can ever exhibit any other than a sunny side to the woman of my choice? or that I have any other side to exhibit, in fact?"

"You can never be other than a dear good fellow, Charley; but suppose adversity should make your pocket-book lean, and the clouds should gather thick and fast in your sky, will your personal sunshine keep the damp and chill from your home, and prevent the tempest? or even the little whirlwinds, which disturb domestic tranquility?"

"Prevent it? Of course it will! How can there be any storm, where the domestic air is kept full of such warm and luminous sentiments as these flying about,—my joy! my sweet-scented orange blossom! my delectable juice of pineapple! my luscious essence of figs! Eh? my veteran, of long and varied experience!"

"I speak only as a student and close observer."

"Well, my Carrie is necessary to my happiness, squalls and chills notwithstanding, O, great philosopher!"

"If you marry only to make yourself happy, your selfishness will deserve defeat, and Carrie will prove more of an angel than I think she is, or you will wake up some dark morning and lament with the Dutchman:—

‘When I tinks of what I is
And what I used to vas,
I tinks I frowed myself away
Mitout sufficient cause!’”

"Poor Dutchman! Mine will be a good cause anyway. But if she, too, marries to be happy, are not the conditions of mutual happiness met?"

"Only till the glamour passes off, my untutored boy. Selfishness is a non-unionist, pulls apart, and never goes beyond itself, except to get something not its own."

"Yes, but you leave out the factor, love!"

"You left it out, and I took you at your word. Marrying to make yourself happy is a selfish motive. Love does not think of self, but of the object loved, and finds its highest happiness in the happiness of that object."

"Ah! I see I am a neophyte, and surrender to your erudite and more comprehensive interpretation. Carrie Horton is a necessity to me, because I can only be happy in serving her happiness. How does that terminology strike your judicial sense?"

"Much better, Sir Charles. If you know you are the one to make her happy, and seek to marry her for that purpose, your motive is genuine."

"Of course it's genuine. Don't you think her an angel?"

"No."

"Isn't she seraphic?"

"No."

Charley rose up, threw his hat violently into the bottom of the boat, clawed the air with his spread-out fingers, run them through his hair till every spear stood on end like the quills of a fretful porcupine, rolled his eyes, and, looking like a madman, exclaimed:

"O, for something to quench the flame of my righteous indignation!"

"You might try a little river water," I suggested.

"River water!" he roared; "nothing but the waters of a better judgment on your part can abate this rage."

"Rage? I thought you had only a sunny disposition, which could not rage!"

"Ah! It is the good in me that boils. It is because I have too much sun that I am become a withering, blighting, blasting furnace. O, for breath! I gasp for breath. Tell me, ere I become a cinder, is Ethel Blentwood an angel? Is she a seraph?"

"No, dear fellow. If she were, what man of lesser glory could hope to increase her happiness?"

It is enough for the Lighthearts of earth to win seraphs and marry mortals!"

Charley dropped into the boat collapsed, declaring in an exhausted tone of voice, "You have saved me on the very brink of the ashpit! But have you no praise for Carrie as a mortal?"

"Carrie," I answered, in his own language, "is a lively girl. Yes, I may say without qualification, she is lively."

"That is reviving—talismanic," he said, sitting up.

"I start, I move, I seem to feel
The thrill of life from head to heel!"

which is partly Longfellow and partly Lightheart, the one risen to the zenith of poetic glory, and the other just rising above the horizon."

Saying this, he put on his hat, and began to whistle.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STONE WALL.

WE took dinner that day on a little island, and found the Thornton box well filled with toothsome and nourishing food. We ate heartily, and as we replaced the remaining eatables, Charley gleefully exclaimed, "Two square meals more, before we are reduced to hard tack and dried cheese!"

We re-embarked, two as free and happy fellows as ever sailed down the Connecticut, I imagine, pleasing ourselves by being now chatty and now silent and observant, enjoying to the full the beautiful visions and glorious suggestions, which came to us from shore and sky and water in blissful ignorance of any reverse of good fortune.

All went well till past five p. m., when our craft rose at the bow, quivered, and stopped so suddenly that Charley, at that moment standing, was laid out handsomely at full length. Staring at me with a queer facial expression, he called, "Why don't you put me in the arms of my mother?" Then, looking over the boat's edge, he muttered, "A blow on the head has made me

see stars sometimes, but never a stone wall before !”

“That is what it looks like,” I interjected.

“What ! a stone wall across the bottom of the river ? A likely story !”

“Tell an unlikely one, then !”

Rubbing his eyes he looked again, asking, as if communing with himself, “Is this nigrescent air playing a trick with my senses ? or have we both lost our wits ?” He tried to push the boat. It stuck fast. Rolling up his sleeve he reached down and felt with his hand the rock on which the bow rested. “Sight and touch agree,” he murmured, and then aloud,—“Say, Bloomfield, there wasn’t brandy enough in that pie to fuddle us ?”

“Nonsense ! There was no brandy in it. Aren’t you well ?”

“Never better, but the idea of a stone wall across the river is preposterous ! You are Bloomfield, aren’t you ?”

“Yes.”

“And I am Lightheart ?”

“Yes.”

“And we are in a boat together on the Connecticut River ?”

“We are supposed to be.”

“There is no mistake in our identity ?”

“None.”

“And still you say with me that we are aground on a stone wall ?”

“Yes.”

"Then I see no logical escape from the conclusion that drivelling idiocy is staring us in the face, do you?"

"No escape, unless there is a stone wall!"

"That is absurd on the face of it." And he pounded his head, closed and opened his eyes, tried various experiments to test his mental acumen; but the wall, like Banquo's ghost, would not down; neither would the boat move. He mumbled something about the "absurdest, blankest blank situation!" and then, as if giving up the problem in despair, he lay back in the boat with his fingers interlocked behind his head, and with the most comical expression of perplexity imaginable, said:

"Chum, the next thing we know, if we ever know anything again, we shall be in the 'Greatest Show on Earth!' as curios of mental delusion."

At that moment the thump of paddle-wheels fell on our ears, and soon a steamboat, some distance off, went steaming unobstructed up the river.

"There!" exclaimed Charley, that proves the falsity of our stone wall craze. But what puzzles me is why our senses should deceive us."

"Our senses may tell the truth, Charley; they only say it looks and feels like a wall, and the fault, if any, may lie in the inference we draw, that it is one."

"I enjoy your metaphysics; please go on a bit."

"Well, to illustrate, suppose I see something in a tree which looks like a crow, and at once call it a crow, when on investigation I find it a black knot shaped like a crow, which was at fault, my eyes or my mind?"

"Your mind in its hasty inference, of course. A prudent mind will reflect that things are not always what they seem."

"Precisely. Now the only question is, are we correct in the inference, that our boat rests on a stone wall, because appearances so indicate?"

"That's it. Well, Elbert Bloomfield, I say there is no stone wall here. What do you say?"

"I say just what pleases you. Excuse my laugh, which is one of great admiration. I am proud to be under your leadership. You have entire command henceforth."

"There is no reason, then, why we should not go on," he said demurely, and, putting down the long pole, pushed with all his strength, and the next moment we were struggling in the water amid boughs and boxes and satchels and oars and our boat bottom upwards, upon each end of which we managed, after much difficulty, to mount and balance ourselves by lying face downward. A dense fog enveloped the banks, and we could not estimate the distance, or know whether the shore at this point was accessible. A precarious predicament, and yet the irrepressible buoyancy of Charley's spirits soon asserted itself, and he asked :

"How do you like my leadership?"

"The way you took us over that—that—obstruction," I answered, my teeth beginning to chatter, "was something more than skilful navigation, it was splendid strategy, it was brilliant pyrotechnics, and had it imparted its warmth to this bath it would have filled me with admiration!"

"As it is, it only filled you with river water," Charley added, raising his wet face to mine.

"Merely as to my clothes," I asserted, "my spirit is untouched, it is not even damp. But what is the next move, Captain?"

"Put this youngling into his little bed, and accept his resignation as skipper," he answered ruefully.

"I cannot, unless your resignation is in writing," I said firmly.

He raised a pitiful look, and shook his picturesque head, and dolefully exclaimed, "Then, indeed, is my chagrin inconsolable, for all my office material is floating off—hatefully floating off! There goes the Thornton box and the two square meals! I'm glad I ate that piece of pie, I hesitated about. Some things are safe, after all, in this uncertain world!"

"You are not on land yet, Charley."

"I know, but you forget that I'm fat, and it's a long way the fish would have to eat to reach that pie! Besides, unless you object, I think I'll pull for the shore, and for reasons I will state."

"How can a subordinate object? Remember

you are captain of this crew till your written resignation is received. But go on with your logic. That you can preserve the logician in these untoward circumstances, proves your fitness for your high command."

"Well, my first reason is that I can swim ; second, I find it hard to maintain an equilibrium on this slippery boat's back ; third, to remain here endangers my health, which is of some consequence, since there is a girl by the name of Carrie in the world ; fourth, I am not happy here, and sigh for a fire and dry garments on terra-firma ; fifth, I dislike inaction, and unless I act now I shall not have strength to act at all ; sixth, if I go this minute I can explore and return for you ; and seventh, I hope by the glimpse of a light on shore, there may be a house near and comfortable lodgings for two. Are my reasons satisfactory?"

"Amply so, my dear Captain, especially the seventh, which is the ancient number for completeness, as it would seem to be yours. At any rate, it is complete enough for me, and almost warms me to think of it."

"Then, like Simon Peter, I go a-fishing—not, however, as a fisher of fish, or of men, but for the sake of one little woman and yourself. Au revoir!"

"Nay, I go also. Let us not be over-anxious to get on fast. Many people needlessly drown by not keeping cool."

"We shall be cool anyway!" said he, slipping into the water. I followed, and, reaching under the boat, found to my joy, a board seat, which,

as a precaution, I drew under me, and, holding it there with one hand, swam with the other. To our great relief we reached the shore in a few minutes. It was now raining hard. We climbed the bank with some difficulty, and at once set out through the murk and mud towards a light, which glimmered faintly in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHARLEY IS RECOGNIZED.

AS the silhouette of a house appeared on our approach, nearly at the same time the light disappeared; but we found a door, and I said to Charley, "I am only a high private; it is your knock." We were both shaking with the cold so that our articulation was very imperfect, yet, though the preliminaries to a fire might be prolonged, I could not resist so unique an opportunity of enjoying his odd way of doing things. He knocked gently at first, and then banged the door till a man's head was thrust out of an upper window, when a hoarse voice started the following dialogue:

"Who's there?"

"It is I."

"Well, who is I?"

"Don't you know me?"

"No."

"Well, I don't wonder. I scarcely know myself this dark night, wet and dripping like a drowned rat!"

"Do you know *me*?"

"Know you! Do you suppose a man of your generous hospitality can hide under a bushel?"

"But who the devil are you anyway?"

"Please don't introduce me to your friend, till I am more presentable."

"What friend?"

"Why, the one you just spoke of—Devil, I think you called him."

"Te, he! I guess you don't need no interduction ter him. Yer voice sounds 'ef he'd got ther upper hands on ye ready."

"Well, my good friend, you must remember that your river-water is intoxicating when taken continuously, of a cold night, by an immersion of two hours' duration; and, so, we want you to warm and lodge two of the best fellows you ever saw—sort of angels unawares, you know."

"Where's t'other feller?"

"There he is under that tree, tongue-tied with the cold, waiting for the glow of your hospitable fire."

"Did you say you are wet?"

"Perhaps you have the knack of soaking two hours in the water and keeping dry, but we haven't learned the knack in Massachusetts."

"Where did you say you came from?"

"From the bottom of the river, of course; where do you suppose we came from?"

"Lost anything there."

"Everything."

"Why didn't ye tell that before?"

He took in his bushy head, and then thrust it out with the following result:—

"Have you a lantern?"

"Lantern! How can a man from the bottom of the river be supposed to have a lantern?"

"Oh!" And the head disappeared, when, after a small cyclone, evinced by tumbling chairs and tables, a slender shaft of light shot through the small window-panes, the door was unbarred, and, in nocturnal habit, our bushy friend stood enframed before us.

"Come ter think on't," he said, "my boat's unfit ter use, and lantern's broke, and ye might as well come in, I reckon, and let yer stuff wait till mornin'."

We entered a large and disorderly-looking room, which served for kitchen, dining-room and parlor combined. An ancient cook-stove stood in a large old-fashioned fire-place, with one length of funnel up chimney.

"We're just settlin'," said our host, commencing at once to build a roaring fire, "but I reckon I can make ye as much ter hum as ye was in the river—te, he!" The tea-kettle was soon singing, and, pouring us out two cups of hot water, he declared, "That's as stimerlatin as brandy. I found that out at Saratog where I worked a spell rubbin' down the dudes arter a hot bath, in Dr. Bedortha's water-cure. Ye orter seen um dance when they came out the hot tub and I throwed three or four pails of cold water on um as tight as I could throw! I can see um hop now—te, he, he! ho, ho, ho—o! I'm the feller to tend to ye."

As the heat began to creep satisfactorily into

our nerves, he placed us, denuded of our clothing, one after the other, into a washtub, and turned warm water on our shoulders, and then, throwing over us a sheet previously warmed, rubbed us until we glowed and cried enough. He then rolled us up in warm blankets and quilts, till we looked like mummies, and laid us on a cot-bed in front of the stove. Wringing out our clothes, and hanging them over the stove well filled with wood, (in the meantime solving the stone-wall mystery), he went up to bed, assuring us, with a "te, he!" that we would come out "chic and peert in the mornin'."

By hugging the shore too closely we had, it seems, got into a recently formed arm of the river, across which had been built a wall previous to the washing away of an embankment and the resulting overflow.

We slept a little, and dreamed, and tossed much, until the morning hours warned us that the family would soon be down. To our joy our clothes were quite dry, and we were hastily getting into them, when our host appeared. Something in Charley's incomplete toilet seemed to remind him of the past; for he stared at him, and then, coming nearer, bent forward with his hands on his knees, and, looking him straight in the eye, began to grin.

"Golly, and by jiminy!" he burst out, "ef ye don't look like the ghost what raised the price of my mule! Say, did ye ever ride a vicious white mule?—te, he, he! I'll be doggonned ter hokey

ef you ain't the same chap! Jimminy-crack-corn! It's you just like a mice! Ef this ain't a treat, the demnition bowwows take me!"

He began to see-saw with laughter, holding his sides, when (and just as Charley had got enveloped in pantaloons) the hostess came down, and he exclaimed:

"Marm, this is the feller that frightened me so like the devil, a settin' on the barnyard post in his white clothes!—Hi, hi! ho, ho! oh! ho, ho, ho—o! You are a little the beatenest, queerest cuss I ever seed, and I tell ye, I'm eely most tickled ter death ter see ye. Ef ye ain't welcome to my bed and board, then take me ter heaven this minute!"

"You did us a good turn, mister," said "marm," a masculine, but good-natured looking woman, "and paw has been mighty tickled about it ever since."

"Tickled! Well, I never!" ejaculated the host. "Why, it split me every time I thought on't, and it does seem as ef I'd never git the idee out o' my ticklin, spot, the hull thing was that queer—the queerest in all my born days. And what makes the laugh on the right side o' my mouth is, that that ar mule is as do-cile as a lamb, and I could git a big price for him. I put him ter work that very day a movin' down here, and now (slapping his knee) I'm pretty well fixed for a rise in the world, as the dough said, with the mptins under it. You see, t'other farm I worked er hal'es; but this ere one is mine, when I finish

payin for it ; and I shall pay for it much quicker for the boost you've gin me."

We were congratulating him on his improved prospects, and ourselves especially for having fallen into so good hands, when "marm" said, "Breakfast is ready, paw." We sat down to a much better meal than we expected; and when we took out our wallets, our host and hostess flatly refused to allow any of our money to be left at their house, not even with the young hopeful, their only son. It was broad daylight, and our host said we must be off looking for our plunder. He led the way to the river, and soon discovered the boat near shore, and wading in, hauled it to land, and emptied out the water. The seats, oars, tent, food and housekeeping conveniences were all gone, and no trace of them could be found.

"Don't spose yer wanter sell this ere craft, do ye?" said he, examining the boat with care.

"Shall we turn landlubbers?" I asked Charley.

"It looks like Hobson's choice," he answered, at the same time scribbling his resignation as captain on a scrap of paper, and handing it to me with a polite bow.

"It is reluctantly accepted," I said, "and though your captaincy ends, your genius as navigator, and especially the wonderful skill with which you jumped our vessel over a stone wall will always be admiringly remembered."

"Te, he! That's a good un!" laughed our would-be purchaser, looking up in time to hear the last remark. "I swanny, ef you ain't the

very fust pious fellers that ever made me wanter go ter Heaven! Most o' them kind o' chaps allus seem ter feel so bad 'cause they expected ter go up thar, that I made up my mind I should have ter go down t'other way ter have a good time, and feel ter hum!"

"I hope you will change your mind," I said, grasping him by the hand; "for a Christian is the only one who has the right to be brimful and running over with fun and good cheer; and, unless suffering, he ought to feel it a sin to wear a long face, or be anything less than thankfully, joyously, happy. It is ungrateful to be otherwise."

"Wall, the pious dumps I've met mostly, allus seem ter me ter have somethin' in um that hurt um, and, as I don't want that kind o' stuff in me, I've ginerally managed ter shun their chin music. They act as ef they were tryin' ter please ther Lord by bein' miserable; and either they've got the Lord and Devil, and Heaven and Hell awfully mixed up, or my idees of common-sense are mightily twisted outer jint—one or t'other."

"Narrow Christians do their cause much harm, my good friend, and I hope you will become a thoroughly converted, whole-hearted, joy-beaming and love-o'erflowing Christian, and set the misguided an example. And now, to come back to business, what can you afford to give for the boat?"

"I hain't tin enough about my trowsers ter or'n half pay for her; but I think I can make

her pay for herself this Summer a-lettin' her, ef ye can trust me for the balance."

"Well, let me have what you can spare, and I will leave it to you when to send the rest, and how much." I took his money, giving him my address, and, being unencumbered with luggage, we were ready to start for the railroad station, which, we learned, was much nearer across fields than by road; and, preferring to walk, we refused our host's proffered "wagin," accepting, instead, his pump-handle grip, as we took his rough hand, and said good-bye. We left him, happy in his new possessions, scratching his head and grinning, looking alternately at the boat and at us, as if there must be some doubt about his identity and great good-luck. "By jimminy!" were the last words we heard him say, and, when we turned and waved our hands at him, he threw his hat high into the air like a school-boy.

"That fellow is a phenomenon, and, in by-words, a cosmopolitan," observed Charley, laughing. "Do you expect a remittance?"

"If the boat earns it. At any rate he is happy, and, since he has, perhaps, saved us from illness, I am satisfied."

"I think he intends now to pay it, and may, if he earns it before the story becomes old; but I doubt if you get another penny, Elbert."

"Well, Charley, let us wait, and see which of us has read the deepest into this man's character. He is uneducated and in the rough more than any New Englander I ever met; but if he has not a

homely honesty, which will put to shame the polished exterior of many a city gentleman, I am greatly deceived."

We were now crossing an old pasture, and, picking up a stone which attracted my attention, and, finding it light for its size, I broke it open carefully, and, as I anticipated, found it hollow and lined with beautiful crystals. This geode, which we divided between us as a souvenir of our journey, quickened our mutual taste for geologizing, and we entered the station reluctantly, our walk and studies having been so delightfully recreative and inspiring.

"Did you ever see two happier fellows than we are?" Charley asked, as we sat down in a cool corner—"just as happy without a boat, as with one; when facing an advancing robber, as when he ignominiously retreats; on the slippery bottom of an upturned boat, as on dry land; with teeth chattering before a stranger's door, as when rubbed down and warmed and fed by—by—our bushy-headed bath-man!"

"Well, well!" I exclaimed; "neither of us can tell that man's name!"

"His name is Paw," said Charley, and this, suggesting a panorama too vivid for anything more than interjections, we lost our dignity, and laughed immoderately, unreasonably, till the natives stared.

"You'd be too tired to laf like that, if you'd broke up a quarter of an acre of sward ground, as I have this morning," declared an old farmer,

rather enviously, as he halted in the door, goadstick in hand.

"We broke up more than that several hours ago," Charley controlled himself to say.

"How much did you break up, I wonder?" asked the incredulous farmer.

"We broke up all our calculations," Charley replied soberly, and that made the laugh unanimous, the tired farmer being as much pleased as anybody, and he turned to go out, guessing he could plough the next quarter acre easier for that pun.

"You can do everything easier," Charley asserted, "if you will adopt our creed."

"What might that be?" the farmer asked, expecting another joke.

"It is the belief, and living up to the level of your belief, that there is no such thing as misfortune, except, as my friend here says, doing wrong."

"That's a short creed; but it's mighty hard packed with meat!—mor'n the teeth in my poor brain can gnaw just yet. No use tryin' to catch a weasel asleep. Good-bye, Mr. Weasel!" This compliment brought down the house, and the good old farmer left for his plough, with a helpful thought in his heart, amid cheers and explosive laughter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLOOD.*

WE had not got enough of rustic life and were wishing ourselves among the Berkshire hills, or that we had some other than a public conveyance, when a couple of Yale boys from New Haven walked into the station, one of whom proving to be Charley's classmate who played the guitar at the Negro dance I had witnessed near Dr. Blentwood's, and who was now studying for the degree of LL.B. As we have not introduced him to the reader, we will not do so now, only remarking that he is to-day one of the most useful men of New England, and has solemnly promised not to reveal our identity. They had come in a two-seated carriage, and were expecting two classmates on the next train to join them at this station; but as they kindly failed to appear, we were gladly offered and as gladly accepted, their places, and were soon a merry party of four young men on our way north over the most unfrequented roads along the hill towns of Connecticut and Massachusetts.

As the incidents of this most enjoyable trip

* The flood occurred Saturday, May 16; but the slight anachronism must be forgiven for reasons best known to the author.

are not necessary to our story, suffice it to say that, after sufficient wanderings, we found ourselves at an evening party in a little village, the home of Charley's friend. Here the people were greatly excited over the Mill River flood, caused by the bursting of the Williamsburg dam, of which the daily papers had been full for many days. They read over and over the early as well as the latest details, which the "Springfield Republican" and "Springfield Union" had shown great enterprise in giving, and eagerly sought the more distant Boston and New York papers for what additional accounts and illustrations they might contain.

Some idea of the wide-spread sympathy aroused by this disaster may be formed from the fact that George Bliss, a wealthy merchant of New York, subscribed \$60,000, and the Connecticut Legislature voted \$10,000 for the sufferers, whose affliction was declared to be unparalleled in history. A mountain reservoir had broken away about eight o'clock in the morning, and a few minutes later, Williamsburg, Skinnerville, Haydenville, and Leeds, four manufacturing villages, which, the day previous, were the abode of industry, peace and plenty, were almost wholly wiped out of existence, and 138 human lives lost, to say nothing of domestic animals. An appeal had been made for volunteers, provided with shovels, crowbars, etc., and it was estimated that a thousand men were at work one day, recovering the dead bodies of men, women and children, buried

in the sand and other débris, and it was this appeal, though several days old, which changed our plans, perhaps the whole course of our lives.

It was now Thursday, and, leaving our friends, who had other duties, Charley and I reached Florence that night, which had suffered only in loss of property, and the next morning, with one spade between us and a try-stick, we started early for the scene of sad activity, and found that a once fertile valley had, indeed, become a desert. The broad meadow lands above Florence were covered with sand two or three feet deep and with thousands of cords of timber and building material, some of which was crushed and ground to splinters.

Farther on towards Leeds appeared household furniture, becoming more and more abundant as we advanced, and then mingled with this, as we went on, and half buried in sand and gravel were large quantities of wearing apparel of both sexes, portions of Bibles, hymn-books, photograph albums, mantel ornaments, every step carrying our thoughts away from things, and closer and closer to persons—away from the loss of property to the loss of human life. Parts of cradles and their bedding were strewn everywhere, and when, in addition to these, we came upon broken dolls and children's playthings and babies' shoes and socks and dresses, and thought of the music of pattering feet and innocent voices stilled forever, and happy homes so suddenly, and apparently so needlessly, swept out of existence,

it was enough to make the heart ache and tears to flow from eyes unaccustomed to weep.

It being early, we met no one to give us specific directions, and so travelled on, examining every pile of sand not already dug over, especially where protruded any human garments. Something in one of these mounds yielded suspiciously to the pressure of my stick, regaining its original position when the pressure was removed. I called to Charley, who came with his spade, and, after much labor, we extricated from the limbs of an overturned and completely buried tree, denuded of its bark by the rough scrapings of the torrent, sand and rubbish, a much-torn plush sacque, empty, however, of any human body, but protruding from one of the pockets was a letter which I took out, thinking it might be of value to some one. It was much stained, but the superscription was sufficiently plain, it seemed to me—too plain for my peace of mind, and yet I could not believe my eyes. My hands trembled so I could not hold the letter.

“Take it Charley,” I said, “read the address carefully, and make no mistake.”

I walked about while he examined it, until at length, getting better control of myself, I stopped in front of him. His blanched countenance told me that I was right. I turned away.

“Yes,” he said, “the name is certainly Ethel Blentwood, but this does not prove anything.”

“That is so,” I responded, catching at a faint hope. “To what town is it directed?”

"Williamsburg," was the answer.

My spirits fell again. Still there was no proof that Ethel Blentwood was drowned, only a fearful presumption.

"I will not believe it," I said. "God would not allow it; for she has a mission yet. But I must know the worst. Let us go to Williamsburg at once."

We made a sand-pile to mark the place and started. We passed Leeds and Haydenville, or rather where they had stood, almost unheeding, though destruction, wreck and ruin, and desolation were everywhere. Not a road or bridge could be seen, though of the latter there had been some fine structures of iron and stone. Not a particle of soil or green thing was left anywhere, nothing but stones and gravel and sand, and it did not seem credible that there ever was such a thing as a grass plot in all that valley.

At Skinnerville, which was completely wiped out except the main part of Mr. Skinner's mansion, not even a cellar remained visible. On the outer edge of the flood-track were a few houses not demolished, but standing on their ends, sides, roofs, and even cornerwise, supported in these positions by sand, gravel and rubbish piled up about them. At Williamsburg, which was struck in the lower part of the village, we were told by eye-witnesses that the flood, like a hill or wall of water thirty to forty feet high, and preceded by a cloud of dust and mist, came down the gulch

seething, boiling, thundering, like the rapids of Niagara, scattering and destroying everything in its way. Mammoth trees bowed down before it, or snapped like a reed shaken in the wind. There was no time for reflection. Within fifteen minutes the flood had passed, and the saved came down from high places to find their families, or other near and dear ones, dead and gone.

But these things were incidental to our search, and forced upon us. We did not seek to learn of anything except the one object we had in view. People were now fast gathering, and moving about with sad countenances. We met the Reverend E. R. Thorndike, pastor of the M. E. Church, who had officiated on a previous day at twenty-eight burial services, and was familiar with the names of many of the lost, but none bearing the name on our letter was among them. We secured the latest list of the dead and missing; but the object of our search was not there. This, however reassuring, did not relieve our anxiety. We went to the post-office; no one there remembered delivering the letter.

"Charley," I said, "you are an old acquaintance of the family; it will be proper for you to telegraph an inquiry whether Ethel is at home."

"Yes," he replied, "but the lines are not yet repaired, I think."

I caught a glimpse of a familiar form through the window, and rushed out, followed by Charley.

"Doctor Blentwood!" we both exclaimed in one breath.

"Well, well!" he responded, as much surprised as we, cordially grasping and holding a hand of each of us, †this is sunlight on a dark picture. You look as good as new, Brother Bloomfield, and you, Charley, never had any rain fall into your life, Longfellow notwithstanding."

"Are you all well at home?" I broke in, wishing to end the suspense at once.

"They were when I left. I have been on the wing since, and so have not heard from them. The sad scenes here enacted make me long for the good old home which Ethel has saved to me, and made so bright and cheerful since the death of my dear wife. She is all I have now, and the family separations by this flood are brought home to me with great force. I have come here on my return to learn what God has to say in this great disaster; for I must preach on it Sunday."

"I wish I could hear you, doctor," I said, not yet daring to make known our discovery.

"Come home with me, and help voice this terrible event to my people. I have a feeling that we should not differ in the meaning of it; but, however that may be, I am only anxious that this lesson may not go unheeded, and that God be as fully heard and understood as possible. Besides, I should like to have you take my place one or two Sundays, so that Ethel and I may go on a little journey. My library and home shall be at your service, and you may rule monarch of all you survey."

"I cannot *fill* your place, but shall be glad to

try," I replied, but with a voice a little unsteady, and, as I had betrayed myself, and not knowing how else to proceed, I handed him the letter addressed to his daughter, at the same time explaining how it came into our possession.

He took it with trembling hands; tears came into his eyes, and, with a voice choked with emotion, he said :

"I left Ethel with her cousin at Northampton, and they were to visit Florence, I believe, but were not coming to Williamsburg so far as I know. Let us take the next train; for we are not needed here, and should only fill the places of better men. Besides, your company is a necessity to me now, though I am quite confident that Ethel is safe at home; for she did not wear a plush sacque, and, moreover, I think God will not kill me just yet. When I can see her well provided for, I may then look for the great summons any time; but——"

He did not finish the sentence, and, taking him between us, Charley and I supported his trembling steps to the station where we took the train for Graynoble. When we arrived, the house was well lighted, and, to our immense relief, Ethel was there to receive us, and a delicious supper was in waiting, for she was expecting her father. The doctor embraced his daughter with unwonted affection and tenderness, and she explained the wave-washed letter by the fact that her cousin had addressed her at Williamsburg the very day the doctor had left her at Northampton, supposing her to be there with an old schoolmate, who was

to have had a class reunion. It seemed that the servant girl who went for the mail that fatal Saturday morning, got caught someway in the flood, and was carried away. Her body was found entirely denuded of clothing, which accounts for the separate finding of the tattered sacque containing the letter.

It would be difficult to describe my feelings on taking once more the hand of Ethel Blentwood. As I held it and looked into her lovely eyes, the same thrill I had felt before swept through me ; but I could not tell how far the cry of my heart awakened a responsive answer in hers. Inclined to be self-depreciating, I felt uncertain, and so unreasonably disappointed.

As I retired that night I called to mind Theodocia Thornton and her great love for some one, so confidently revealed to me, and thought how blessed it would be to have such love ! Constituted as I was, it would be more to me than all the wealth of the world. I could not bear to think of mere prudential ideas entering into the motives which weld the bonds of wedlock. I trembled at the very idea of a home in which entered anything short of the purest devotion and the most complete abandonment of self.

As much as I loved Ethel, I could not wish her to become my wife so long as there was a doubt of her returning my affection in full. I must love, if at all, with my whole being, and I saw no hope of making her life a happy one, if I could not express myself strongly without the consciousness

of a check, however slight. I could not be satisfied with that general sort of love which is so common among married people. To wake up after marriage to find I was only receiving a fraction in return for the whole I had given, would be a horrid revelation too terrible to contemplate. The wreck of my happiness might involve the wreck of hers also and others; for I felt sure I should fail to make her life round and full, unless her heart was unreservedly mine. If her life could be fuller of meaning with another than with me, it were better to see her wedded to that other; but how it would tear me to see her tied to one incapable of appreciating her! O, I must win her love, I thought, to save her from that cunning, heartless Stockmire—"that pampered, oversated, stall-fed beast of selfishness!" At least, I must protect her, and if my mission ends there, God's will be done!

In all these musings I did not entertain a single suspicion, that Ethel would not deal honestly with me, or that her ideal of love and home was not as high as mine. I was only reassuring myself of the folly of wishing to marry her, unless her heart could repose blissfully in mine, and never wish for another home. That she was above me need not in itself separate us; for Jesus was above his disciples.

Charley Lightheart, who slept with me, had also his thoughts, which, however, were most pleasing and satisfactory to him, judging from their expression, in his morning dreams, as I awoke. It should be stated that he had spent the previous

evening with Carrie until a late hour. Some of his words were muttered; but I had no difficulty in divining their import.

"Carrie Horton," he said, "you love me, of course; for how could you help it! The only question now is, will you wait till I climb the hill of destiny? or will you climb with me? The only danger of waiting is, that being a very susceptible young man, with so many pretty girls dying for me, I might slip away from you. While star-gazing with some charming belle, and being lifted on the wings of poetic fancy, by the magnetism of a charming night, and the still greater magnetism of a glowing cheek close to mine—occasioned by the focalization of our minds on some bright, particular star, and the intensity of our desire to study that star from the same standpoint, who knows but that in the stealthy, delicious enchantment of the hour, I might be borne away into a new love, and your Charley be lost to you forever! It is a fearful risk! Dare you wait, Carrie? Of course you'll not wait. Well, we'll commence together at the foot, and enjoy the climb all the way up; and, when the prospect is sufficiently bright, we will build a wigwam, and in due time a palace."

I burst out laughing. Charley opened his eyes with, "What's the matter now, old fellow? Glad because you are back again where you left your heart?"

"I am laughing, Charley because you are so sure of your game, and are so happy over it."



"YOU LOVE ME, OF COURSE?" — *Page 356.*



"Sure of my game and happy! Art thou dreaming of the chase, young man?"

I only laughed the more. He turned towards me with a stare, and, apparently guessing the source of my merriment, said:

"Dear old shipmate, you may laugh; for I am happy as a clam in high water. I am swelled, lifted, exported with happiness—an emigrant from infelicity and an immigrant to bliss perpetual. My soul is as full of song and sweetness as a lark just up from a bed of rosebuds! The fact is I am in the swim, on the topmost wave of good fortune, floating on it, deliciously basking in the glad sunshine of a peace most serene! In short, I am rocked, rapturously rocked, in the cradle of an accepted lover! Wonder not at the neophyte's happy mood!"

"How and when did you get on so amazing fast?" I asked.

"The climax was capped last night," he answered.

"Then what you said in your dream this morning was not all a dream."

"What was it?"

I told him. His laugh was a sufficient answer; but he would neither affirm nor deny, that the closing sentences were distinguished by any unnecessary punctuation marks.

The tones of the rising bell now reached us, and we dressed for breakfast. Charley's happy mood seemed to be catching; for, when we went down, we were cheerfully greeted, and it was a

chatty group that gathered about the family-table. A feeling of gladness seemed to pervade all hearts that we were together again safe and well. We talked and laughed of our first meeting, of Charley's and my experiences down the river, and up among the hill-towns, of parish incidents, and other light relaxing themes. It was in part a reaction from the sad sights and thoughts of the previous day. Ethel was as bright and sparkling as the dewdrops, which were seen dancing in the sunlight through the eastern window. It was a glad morning indoors and out, and after breakfast, Dr. Blentwood led in a prayer of great tenderness and thanksgiving for God's preserving mercies to us all. Then Charley hurried me off to his brother's office.

Dr. Lightheart was much pleased with my improved condition, and expressed his satisfaction that I was to give in Dr. Blentwood's pulpit the first draft of a course of lectures, which I had promised the Thorntons more formally to give later; but he stipulated that I should shut down the mental mill each day at noon, and roam the woods and hills. This I could do, as no pastoral work was expected of me.

Leaving Charley with his brother, I came back via the river, spending most of the remaining forenoon arranging my thoughts on the Williamsburg disaster, sitting under a wide-spreading elm, and on the very seat occupied by Ethel and me the evening I first met Stockmire.

Fortunately I broke away from that enchanted



"THEY WERE TOO HAPPY FOR INDOORS."— Page 359.

spot in season for dinner; and, after that necessary repast, who should call but Charley and his Carrie!

They were too happy to contain themselves indoors on so pleasant an afternoon, and so, Dr. Blentwood being engaged in his study, we four took a long stroll into the woods, and up the mountain, so called, to a peculiar formation of ledge, known as the "poet's seat," overlooking a very pretty landscape. The weather was just right for comfort, and we sat there for an hour or two, chatting, laughing, and singing gospel hymns.

Occasionally Ethel's eyes met mine, setting in motion an electric current, which caused my pulse to beat faster. There was so much depth and meaning in those orbs of hers! They fascinated and drew me like a magnet. I wondered if they had so much for others as for me. They were windows indeed, through which her very soul seemed to look. Was there not something more than kindness there? And would that something ever be transmuted by my great passion into the glow of an ardent love? Time would tell, and I must be patient.

On our way home, when I might have had an opportunity for a little private conversation with Ethel, who should cross our path but Stockmire, the man for whom I felt an unexplained repulsion, as from a creeping thing! A change came over Ethel's countenance; but what that change meant I could not decipher. With a bland smile and

that innocent drawl of his, he welcomed Charley and myself back, as if he honestly meant it.

He invited himself to walk with us, and so spoiled my enjoyment for the return home, though I tried prayerfully to free myself from prejudice, and to appreciate him at the value accorded to him by others. I even punished myself by trying to be affable to the man, whom, in thought, I had perhaps injured. I wished to think well of him, as others did; but in all my attempts to charitably analyze him, I could not escape the conviction that at heart he was deceptive and utterly selfish. So unaccountably did he affect me, that, when he had shaken my hand at parting, I went at once to my room and washed off the slime, which seemed to have gathered there, before I realized what I was doing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT CHURCH.

SUNDAY morning we all went to Church, even to Tom and Tot and their unruly Pomp; for no cooking, and therefore no excuse for absence, was allowed on Sunday. Dr. Blentwood's text was from Amos iii. 8—"The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" He could recall no period of American history in modern times, where it seemed to him God had spoken so loudly and so plainly as in the Williamsburg flood; and that person, he thought, would be remiss in duty, who did not study to know the meaning of the message and profit by it. He graphically described what he saw and heard and felt, relating many touching incidents and providential escapes, and then asked the meaning of all this?

"Some tell us," he said in substance, "that God caused all this destruction and sorrow as a direct punishment of the people for their sins; but I prefer to say what we know to be true, that the cause was a broken law of nature and of nature's God. God did not break one of His own laws to punish anybody. That law was broken by

man. The fact is, the Williamsburg dam, professing to protect the people from one hundred and eleven acres of water, forty feet deep in the centre, with an average depth of twenty-six feet, was a builded lie. Had it been built in harmony with God's laws, it would have stood, and that beautiful valley would not have been turned into the valley and shadow of death.

"Who does not know that sand will wash and clay slip, and water seek a level? These laws have not changed since the foundation of the world, and are, therefore, familiar to everybody; and yet that dam, which might have had the permanent support of the law of gravitation, was built and maintained in defiance of it, and, slipping from its insecure foundation, a wall of water forty feet high rolled down on unsuspecting villagers, some of them asleep in their beds; and, were it not for the warning cry of the flying horseman, 'The dam has burst, flee to the banks,' the loss of life would have been much greater. Shall we blame God for this disaster? or shall we learn the lesson that God's laws are eternal and cannot be broken with impunity?"

He then spoke of the majesty and beauty of God's laws, the loss we sustain in neglecting them, and the injury we inflict on ourselves and others in disobeying them, dwelling, at the close, upon the help to obedience from Him, who came to build up, and not tear down, our manhood and womanhood.

He was very eloquent. Never before was I so

impressed with the perfection and beneficence of God's laws, both natural and spiritual. I dropped my pencil and notebook, and listened spellbound to the end of the discourse. It would be useless to attempt a portrayal. Enough has been indicated to define his position, which is all that is essential to this story. Suffice it to say, the audience went away with tear-dimmed eyes, except a few carping critics, whose hearts were too dry to weep, among whom I recognized the voice of Mrs. Lightheart, declaring emphatically:

"I wish Dr. Blentwood would preach to sinners, and let us Christians enjoy our religion. Just as though I have anything to do with law, when Jesus paid it all, all the debt I owe! God drowned those people for their sins, and it's rank heresy to deny it."

I made no reply, concluding to adopt the plan of the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, and wait. That evening, when the hour came for me to speak, according to announcement, I said in support of the doctor's position, in the course of my address:

"I am afraid some Christians will not learn anything from this disaster, and that is the most fearful thing about it. The Lord God has spoken in plain, unequivocal terms, declaring that those who disobey, or even neglect, His laws, incur the risk of a terrible penalty; and this is as true of spiritual as well as of physical laws. And yet, so-called Christians tell us they have nothing to do with law!—that Jesus relieves them from any

and all obligation to law; whereas He expressly declares He came, not to destroy, but to fulfill; in other words, to bring His followers into harmony with law, and help them obey it. The real Christian loves the law of God, because it is the expression, the very transcript of the Divine Mind. He thankfully sings with the psalmist, 'Oh, how love I Thy law! Great peace have they who love Thy law.' It is the man who loves not God, that hates His laws; for he is out of harmony with them, and has no help to obey them.

"It is a sham Christianity that would be relieved from the responsibility of doing right. If this disaster teaches anything, it teaches that God's face is eternally set against shams and all forms of hypocrisy, and that the only way to be safe in our walks among the laws of God, is to be honest and true and square-dealing, not only in building dams, but in all our business and social relations—in other words, to wear our religion every day in the week, and not merely on Sunday and in the prayer-room.

"If this doctrine prevents any one from enjoying his religion, then, I fear, he does not know God or Christ, and is crying Peace, peace, when there is no peace. His sham Christianity, like the Williamsburg dam, may deceive for a while, but detection and disaster must eventually overtake it. Let those, who are misled by false interpretations, remember that those, who trusted a false dam, suffered the penalty of their unwise-

dom as much as if they had been participants in its construction ; and let them not rest, till they have worked their feet down through the rubbish of error, and felt them firmly planted on the rock of eternal truth."

"Amen," cried several voices, but Mrs. Light-heart only groaned, and looked upon me as a heretic to the established faith. Stockmire, in the after-meeting, was profuse in his praise of the morning sermon and of the evening address ; but we afterwards remembered that he sat down glancing at Ethel to see what impression his remarks had made upon her. He went home with her from church, while her father and I conversed together, arm-in-arm, a little behind them. Stockmire seemed to be urging something with great earnestness, but what she said in return seemed to be monosyllabic. At the next street corner they went home another way, and the doctor and I went at once to his study to consult a Greek verb, and I did not see her again that night.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

STOCKMIRE HAS DESIGNS.

THE next morning Ethel Blentwood appeared pale and worn, as if she had passed a sleepless night. Her hands trembled, as she officiated at the breakfast-table, and she was so perturbed and absent-minded, that she made some awkward mistakes. I was sure that her condition had some relation to Stockmire; but her father, if he noticed anything unusual, only felt the urgency of getting her away from excessive church cares, and tales of sorrow poured into her sympathetic ear by those who had lost intimate friends in the Williamsburg flood—one of those bereaved ones being a sister of the girl in whose sacque I had found Ethel's letter. These things, undoubtedly, had something to do in rendering her susceptible of agitation, but they were not the direct cause, I was certain.

I drove them to the station, and as Ethel gave me her hand and said good-bye, I pressed it with both hands, and felt its trembling, but could not see her eyes, which were cast down, and, therefore, could not read what I wanted to find there.

Without turning towards me again, she entered the car, and disappeared, though the doctor lifted his hat, and waved me a final adieu from the car platform.

"That trouble," I said, as I drove back, "is something more than physical."

While Tom was taking care of the horse, I got from him the exasperating fact, that Stockmire had called very often during my absence, and that it looked to him "as if he were done gone on Miss Ethel, sure."

"He proposed to her last night," I said to myself, as I went to the doctor's study, which was now to be mine for at least two weeks, "and who knows what poison he has poured into her unsuspecting ear! I was tortured with vague guesses and fears all day, and sleep brought no surcease to my anxieties; for I only slept at intervals to dream of horrid plots by Stockmire to secure the hand of Ethel. His oily tongue would make everything smooth to her, and yet, under the cover of that smoothness, he would stop at nothing to compass his personal aims. I felt sure of it, though he was popular, and held one of the highest local offices. I did not then know the questionable methods by which he had defeated a much better man; but I felt what I could not explain, that, beneath his humble exterior, he was hard and unscrupulous at heart—not of the Uriah Heap sort exactly, but more like the polished, yet equally hypocritical, Pecksniff.

I met him during the day, and he was unusually

cordial and adroitly flattering towards me, if not to everybody. "Is his politeness due to his acceptance by Ethel?" I queried. It looked like it, and a momentary wave of despair rolled over me, engulfing all my bright hopes. Is it possible that one with the delicate sensitiveness and spiritual insight of Ethel Blentwood, could fail to see through the false pretences of Wilson Stockmire? I thought not, and yet what made him so apparently happy? * On the other hand, what made Ethel so nervous and shaken! If she has accepted him, it must be from a painful sense of duty, and not from love. There must be some diabolical plot beneath this fair exterior of Stockmire, which is tearing the heart of that dear girl, and which he is counting on as ultimately succeeding if not already victorious, with her.

"It must not, shall not succeed," I said, with every nerve and muscle in full tension. It was with difficulty I could contain myself in my anxiety to fly at once to her rescue. I hurried back to the library, or study, in a state of frenzy, and, throwing my hat on the lounge, walked the room repeating, "It must not, shall not be. I will ferret out this wickedness.—O, diabolism itself! to deceive an innocent girl, and lead her to sacrifice her happiness under a false sense of duty! for that is the trick I expect to unearth. If it be right to ask help from above for anything, it is right to ask it in saving this beautiful and accomplished girl from the letter of a loveless marriage and a lifelong regret."

That night, as I read my Greek Testament and sank on my knees, my prayer was that her happiness and usefulness might be subserved, whatever the loss to me. If I was self-deceived and was seeking my own happiness more than hers, I wanted my selfishness revealed to me. At the bedside I knelt again, repeating the same prayer, and asked to be guided aright. At length the shadow of heavenly wings seemed to brood above me, and, comforted and refreshed, I fell asleep, and in my dreams, heard angelic voices singing, "I will guide thee with mine eye."

The next morning Tom informed me that Mr. Stockmire wanted him to help about the store, as one of his clerks was absent.

"Go by all means, Tom, and act as my diplomat," I said.

"What's dat?"

"Keep your eyes and ears open to everything Stockmire says and does, but do not let him discover that you are watching him."

"I larned to do dat down Souf, where all de slaves were dipplemats, peers like. We knowed eberyting de white folks did, but we nebber let on," and Tom pumped his shoulders in high glee over his astuteness.

When Tom returned from his day's work at Stockmire's, he brought me a note from the Eli-sons, inviting me to tea the following day, and reported.

"I haint much plomacy to tell, but dare be somfin goin on under a mighty mystification, sz'

for Boss Stockmire tuk mose eberyone to where I couldn't hear, and talked bery spiciously; and once I heered him say, 'It's too bad dare be such a feelin' 'ginst Dr. Blentwood.'"

"Feeling against Dr. Blentwood!" I exclaimed in amazement. "Everybody loves him."

"Dat be true, sah, as I allus heerd so; but I tells ye de truf perzactly what Boss Stockmire said, and I is mystified, sah, I may say discomboberated, sah. But Ize gwine to keep my promatic eye open, till I fine de debbled at be snuffin' round here like a roarin' lion seekin' whom he may devour somebody, and hep you drive him out before he git us all inter de quagmire, Perfessor Boomfield."

As I had two lectures to prepare for Sunday, and to arrange whatever side thoughts, which might be awakened, for an address to the young people, I had no time to mingle much with the members of the church, taking my exercise through unfrequented streets into the fields and woods, in obedience to Dr. Lightheart; and if sometimes condensing needed stretch of muscle and expansion of lungs into as short space of time as possible, it was only to gain time for study in the afternoon. I hoped, however, by accepting a few invitations to tea, to learn something of the status of the parish mind, and Stockmire's relation thereto.

The supper at Mr. Elison's passed off pleasantly, Mr. and Mrs. Elison and daughter proving agreeable and even intelligent people; but Stock-

mire was there to prevent any too confidential relations, and the consequent attainment of the object I had in view, by engaging me in conversation for his own purposes. He surprised me by asking if I agreed with Dr. Blentwood in denying that God caused the Mill River flood, explaining that the pastor's position had produced a good deal of commotion among some of the church members.

"God permitted it," I answered, "because it was the natural result, or penalty, of His broken law, or laws."

"What laws?" he asked.

"The laws that water will press in proportion to its height, and that an unstable foundation will wash away. Both of these laws were violated in the building and maintaining of the Williamsburg dam, and God did not suspend the penalty naturally following such violation; but His loving providence was seen in the saving of hundreds of innocent lives, as their marvelous escapes plainly indicate."

I felt chagrined to have to explain so simple a matter, and for the second time, to an intelligent man at this late day; for I suspected he was feeling for a new wire to pull against Dr. Blentwood or me, with some ulterior design on Ethel's hand, though just the game he was playing, I could not then fathom. He was very attentive to Miss Elison, the heir to a considerable fortune on the death of her parents. "If he can't get Ethel, he is preparing the way to secure Miss Elison," I

thought. I went home puzzled, and got little light from Tom.

The next day Charley Lightheart called, and I unfolded to him my suspicions. He had engaged as a reporter on a Boston daily, and had but little time to look up the matter; but he learned that Stockmire had been quoting others against the pastor, always refraining, however, from giving his own opinion. Finally Charley called at his store, and Stockmire told him, with apparent regret, of a general desire for a change in the pastorate, and that it was too bad, since there had been such a good feeling in the church. Charley tried to get him to name individuals, who were dissatisfied; but he would not come down from generalities, repeating, that come thought him not sound in doctrine, and others that he was too old, and that a young man with new methods would better build up the church.

"If the feeling is so general," said Charley, "I should think you might name one of the malcontents."

Under hard pressure he finally named Mrs. Smithers, an old lady and a widow. Charley went to her direct, and found her greatly grieved that she, or any one, could be supposed in opposition to Pastor Blentwood.

"Then you have expressed no dissatisfaction?" he asked.

"Indeed not," was her earnest answer. "We are very fortunate if we can keep him, he is so

able and such a comforter to the worn spirit, such a feeder to the hungry soul!"

"What did Stockmire say to you, Mrs. Smithers?"

"He asked me if I should want a man for my pastor, who held that God took no interest in such disasters as the bursting of the Williamsburg dam, and I answered no, for such a pastor could not preach the God I needed and believed in."

"Did Stockmire claim that Dr. Blentwood holds such views?"

"He told me that church members so interpreted his sermon on the Mill River flood, and were demanding a change in the pastorate."

"When I heard that," said Charley, in giving an account of the affair to me, "I did not have to hunt round after the ancient Adam in me in order to get mad. I was furious, or righteously indignant, as the ministers might say, and presumably shocked the old lady by calling Stockmire a creeping, crawling serpent, fit only for crocodile swamps and the demnition bow-wows! He knows that the majority of people are not independent thinkers, but are unconsciously led by the opinion of others; and, so, he is endeavoring to create public opinion by misrepresenting it—announcing that to be public sentiment, which, originally at least, existed only in his own lying heart."

"It is true, my sister-in-law, and those like her, disapproved of the sermon, because it touched their selfishness; but even they would not originate a movement to get rid of the pastor."

CHAPTER XL.

ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING.

THE next Sunday, among other notices I read from the pulpit, was one announcing the annual meeting of the Church and Society to be held the following Friday evening.

Of the two lectures given that day it need only be said that they awakened a good deal of interest among the thinking portion of my audience.

The only dissent from the views expressed came from the Mrs. Lightheart class of minds, whose opinions, though having some influence, were of no value to a scholar.

At the annual meeting there was a large attendance of Mr. Stockmire's friends, who were unaccustomed to attend such meetings, and a strong under-current of feeling pervaded the assembly. The appropriations for music and other expenses of the church were made without much opposition; but when the question of the pastor's salary was reached, Mr. Stockmire moved to adjourn, thinking, no doubt, that would be the best way to lead the pastor to resign. Charley Lightheart, who was present and still a member of the Society, moved that two hundred dollars

be added to the salary. This Stockmire opposed in the interest, he pretended, of Dr. Blentwood, for whom he professed great friendship. It would be misleading, and might prevent the pastor, under a mistaken sense of duty, from accepting a more desirable call elsewhere ; and for one he thought it the pastor's privilege and duty to go where he could retrieve his fortunes lost by bad investments.

Charley answered, if the pastor had lost money through the advice and agency of Mr. Stockmire, he should be the first to put his hand down deep into his own pocket, and not plan to send him to strangers. That was not the way to discharge an honest obligation.

I had supposed until this moment that Dr. Blentwood was financially well off, if not wealthy ; but Ethel's sorrow came into my mind, and it flashed upon me instantly that Charlie's quick inspiration had hit the real cause of any loss the doctor had sustained, and, therefore, that Stockmire's covert fling had only recoiled upon himself, where it belonged. Stockmire turned red and green and then blue ; but Charley held the floor, and, stepping into the aisle, said :

" I have heard a good deal about dissatisfaction with the pastor, but in every instance I have traced the rumor to one source. It has also been extensively reported that the young people desire a young pastor, but as one of them I wish to correct that report. Though a young man, when it comes to food I prefer beef-steak to veal—in

other words, a pastor who knows more than I do, a man of experience and thought, and no mere gabbler.

"It is said (Mr. Stockmire is my authority) that a young man would be more emotional; but what does emotion amount to unless distended with thought? We want something better than assertions and everlasting gabble. With some people skim-milk is as good as cream, if only kept stirring. They are attracted by noise, and he that makes the most noise is the best fellow with them. Goldsmith's noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool, would highly entertain them, if said geese only wore the human form. Gabble seems to be the fashion just now. The pulpit gabbles; the bar gabbles; the bench gabbles; the rostrum gabbles; office-seekers gabble; everybody that is anything gabbles, and he who can't gabble, or won't gabble, better go to sea, or so command bayonets and bullets as to make the enemy gabble, as Grant did, and then all the people will gabble for him, and he can sit in his presidential chair, and gabble back or not as he pleases.

"Give me a man of mature thought, who has outgrown the gabble age of his development, for my pastor. And you men of experience, I must believe, want no greenhorn, fresh from the gospel mills, who thinks he knows everything, and yet knows nothing except what books and theological seminaries have taught him. As to orthodoxy, there can be no heterodoxy so dangerous as the infinite fear some people have of ever learning

anything. They eat, and would make everybody else eat mouldy bread, made in the early periods of the race, whereas we can have it at the hands of wiser cooks, fresh from new wheat growing in the fields of to-day.

"Dr. Blentwood is abreast of the times, and preaches a gospel, which appeals to every man's nineteenth century common sense. If I have learned that there is a grand truth in Christianity, which wins me, it is owing to the eminently reasonable views of Dr. Blentwood and Professor Bloomfield."

Charley's speech called forth hearty laughter, and when he sat down there was a general clapping of hands and calls for Professor Bloomfield. I arose, and simply said :

"It does not become me to speak at your business meeting, not being a member of your society. I may properly say, however, that I have been very strongly impressed with the great worth of Dr. Blentwood. I esteem him as a man of rare ability and goodness ; and no people, in my opinion can be more fortunate than those privileged to listen to the grand and helpful truths, to which he gives utterance in his pulpit ministrations.

"Like my friend Lightheart, I am a young man, but I bow with profound respect and reverence to age. Indeed, I never get quite so near Heaven, as when I take an old man by one hand and a little child by the other, the one fresh from the portals of Eternal Morn and the other just entering there."

Hearty cheering followed these brief remarks, indicating that the friends of the pastor were largely in the majority ; but Stockmire jumped up, and tried to feel the pulse of the opposition by making a Pecksniffian speech ending with the following question :

" I would like to ask Professor Bloomfield, with reference to Mr. Lightheart's nineteenth century common sense, if we have not the truth once delivered to the saints, and if there is any progress in truth?"

" I certainly believe," I replied, " that we have the truth, as we have the earth, once delivered to the saints ; but I should be very sorry to think man so stationary that he cannot have, and enjoy a progressive interpretation of both the earth and the Bible."

Stockmire reefed his sails, and started again :

" Church members complain that the pastor preaches righteousness too much, and against hypocrisy, dishonesty, social exclusiveness and unbrotherliness, and thus disturbs their devotional feelings and peace of mind, instead of giving them their needed Sabbath rest by having their hearts flooded with love."

Charley was on his feet before Stockmire was fairly seated, and said :

" The last speaker's remarks remind me of Robert Colyer's Chicago man, who spent much of his life in prison, but in the intervals of freedom had blessed seasons of hymn singing and prayer

in religious meetings, where nothing was said to disturb his conscience."

Dr. Lightheart, who was standing at the door, having just come in, added :

"When I was South, I learned of a colored preacher who had great power with his audiences, and was asked to preach against theft and other dishonest practices, of which his church was guilty ; but he replied, 'Dat will nebber do, brodder, it would frow such a coolness ober de meet-in.' I don't know that *all* of you church members can stand honest preaching, but those of us outside believe in it."

During the laughter which followed, I noticed Charley tucking a dollar bill into Tom's hand, who rose rather falteringly, but spoke with all the more effect because it took the audience by surprise :

"Dear Brederen, Misser Stockmire have said dat he wish ter so lib as ter leab de world better dan he fine it ; and I wish ter say for his courage-ment, and de comfort ob us all, dat de signs am pooty clare dat he'll hab his wish ; for it peers like as if de world will be better off when he's gone."

This brought down the house, metaphorically speaking. The audience fairly roared with laughter, occasionally bursting out afresh after they had determined to control their risibles. Had a vote been taken, it would have been carried overwhelmingly in favor of the pastor ; but Mr. Stockmire gave a very plausible, and apparently very honest, but, as it afterwards proved,

trumped-up excuse for adjournment at the call of the chairman to be given Sunday from the pulpit, and the meeting was so adjourned.

As the chairman was Stockmire's tool, the latter was very complacent and full of honeyed words for everybody. Indeed, so excessive was his warmth that Charley declared it would require an extra watering-cart to lay the dust occasioned by his over abundant sunshine.

"I fear," he whispered, "I shall be out of pocket to the extent of a sun-umbrella, or out of health to the extent of a sunstroke, if that smile becomes any more sultry and scorching!"

At that instant I happened to look at Stockmire, who was watching us, and was startled at the almost fiendish spirit, which, in a moment of forgetfulness, had come to the surface and made ugly his Jewish features. The smile, then, was only a veneer to cover up something fierce and grim, which, in an unguarded moment, had darkened forth from the whole man!

From that time on, Stockmire went diligently to work, poisoning the minds of church members, not in open warfare, but in true Pecksniff style, quoting everybody in general and nobody in particular, except where he knew the lie would not be detected. Where he could, he made the most of what he declared to be a universally accepted fact, that the pastor did not believe in Divine Providence, and was otherwise theologically unsound, and consequently an unsafe teacher.

It is needless to cumber these pages with the

falsehoods and half-truths, worse than falsehoods, with which he effected his purpose, all the while attitudinizing as an aggrieved friend of Dr. Blentwood. Suffice it to say, no notice of the adjourned meeting was handed me to read the following Sunday. This aroused the friends of Dr. Blentwood, comprising all the thinking and wealthy members of the society, and a paper was circulated, giving a very cordial and urgent invitation to Dr. Blentwood to take charge of an independent body to be known as the Church of Christian Endeavor, with pledges amounting to \$2,500,00 for his yearly salary—\$500 more than he was then receiving. This paper was to be presented by an influential committee on the doctor's return from his vacation trip.

CHAPTER XLI.

RAILROAD ACCIDENT AND DILEMMA.

THE maiden aunt of Miss Elison died suddenly, and Mr. Elison, who felt her loss keenly, was taken ill a few days later, and sent for me. I went at once to his bedside, and found him much agitated. Drawing me towards him, and eyeing Mr. Stockmire, who had become a boarder in the family and very officious in his attentions to all the inmates, he said in a half whisper, "I am being poisoned." Whether Mr. Stockmire heard these fearful words or not, he must have divined their import; for, on my departure, he followed me to the door, and soberly asked:

"You will not think anything of what he said?"

"Certainly not," I answered, "Mr. Elison is evidently a little out, and not responsible for all he says."

In three days Mr. Elison was dead; and from that hour Mrs. Elison became a changed woman. At the funeral her pale, haggard face moved my sympathies deeply, and I tried in vain to lead her to rest her burden at the feet of the

Burden-bearer, and to remember that she had not lost her husband, but that he had only gone a few days in advance to eventually welcome her to a better mansion on high. I called the next day, and reminded her that she had now a loved daughter to live for, hoping, by centering her thoughts and affections on the living, to bring her back to the duties of the present; but she was uncommunicative, and her eyes were fevered and wild, like one surprised and stunned by a blow from a friend, and had no one left to trust. She seemed frightened at times and to pant for words to express something, and would then make some commonplace remark, all the more pathetic from the effort made to conceal, rather than reveal, her thoughts.

I found it impossible to comfort her, and she grew paler every day, until she became ghostly, and almost transparent in appearance. Taking her bed soon, she gradually, but steadily, wasted away, her physician, as he explained it, finding in her system no leverage of strength, against which his medicine could pry.

But before her demise the city was thrown into excitement by the news of a railroad accident, and that among the dead and wounded were Dr. Blentwood and daughter. From the description given, I concluded that the accident occurred not far from the Thorntons, and I took the next train for the scene of sorrow.

I will not burden the reader with any details of the sickening horror, of which the papers were

full. Suffice it to say that the names of my loved friends were not among the dead. Hearing that Thornton was early on the scene of action, and that he and his sister had thrown open their house to the wounded, I crossed the newly-made gully, bridged by an overturned car, and was quickly at their door. Mr. Thornton met me cordially, and, to my earnest question, answered that the parties I desired to see were there, all the others having been removed by their friends, and he took me at once to Dr. Blentwood's bedside. He looked up, as we approached, with a pleased surprise, and returned my greeting with all the warmth of his friendly nature.

"Providence has sent you to me a second time," he said with a grateful smile, "once on your account and now on my account. We are friends by providential arrangement, and may be destined to some pleasant duties together hereafter, differences of age and strength notwithstanding."

"Yes," I answered, venturing at what I thought to be his meaning, "neither extent of space nor duration of time, nor the loss of what is merely foreign and of no further use to us, can touch our souls or our friendship."

He pressed my hand, which still enclosed his, as he added, "You and I know—and what a comfort it is!—that real life is not dependent on fortune or misfortune. It is beyond the reach of accident or bodily disaster."

As he paused, I looked about the room, and

seeing the question in my eyes, he explained the absent one by saying :

"Ethel, dear girl, I hope is fast asleep. She has been an angel of mercy, watching by my side, anticipating every want, heroically covering every sign of fatigue, till I became conscious enough to know she was almost completely exhausted, and then I had to plead our mutual love before she would go willingly to seek rest in sleep. She is like her mother, all devotion, self-sacrifice itself. God bless her!" and the tears moistened his eyes. "For her sake only I would like to live a little longer, until——"

He did not finish, and I said enthusiastically, "You will ; you must !"

He smiled faintly, and, noting his weakness, and promising to see him after he rested, I retired to the adjoining room. Thornton was waiting for me, and I asked :

"Where is your sister?"

"Theo," he answered, "is in bed. I left her a few moments ago resting beautifully."

"What ! Is she ill? Was she hurt?" I asked eagerly.

"No, not hurt," he answered, "but she over-worked in the excitement of the disaster, and, being delicate, she was quickly prostrated. I hope to see her up in a day or two ; but she is not so strong as when you were here before, and every unfavorable circumstance, like this, worries me, though, in the end, I think, through Miss Blentwood, it may be a God-send to her ; for they

fell in love with each other at once, and it was Miss Blentwood who put Theo to bed, and has run to her whenever she could leave her father even for a moment. She seems a charming girl, and a very worthy daughter of a very worthy man. Old acquaintances of yours, I infer?"

"Yes," I answered, thinking of heart-throbs rather than clock-time, "and very dear friends of mine; but when can I see Miss Thornton?"

"She will wish to see you as soon as she learns you are here."

"Has she really been failing in health?"

"Yes, rapidly."

"Can nothing be done to arrest the disease?"

"Everything apparently has been tried; but it is a case physicians cannot control."

I looked at him inquiringly, and he proceeded.

"There is one man, and only one, who can prolong her life, and he is not a physician."

"And he will not?" I asked in surprise, and then recalling my last interview with her, I added, "Does not the man she admires and loves yet know?"

He eyed me closely, and, it seemed to me, almost suspiciously, as he answered, "She has told you all, and yet you ask such a question?"

"Nay, not all. I only know she worships some one, and my advice to her was to let the man know the treasures of heart and brain in store for him."

"I believe you," he said, thrusting his hands through his hair in great perplexity.

"Believe me! Did you say believe me? That implies a previous doubt. Explain yourself," I said with great earnestness.

"I—I thought," he stammered,—“I mean I had special reasons for wishing that you did not know, and my words were in the nature of a glad assurance to myself, and yet, I thought—I naturally inferred that you knew. I see now how it is. I suppose sister Theo confided in you to get your advice. Do you still advise that he be informed?”

"Yes; for he may be a modest, self-depreciating person, who could not believe, unless actually told, that he is the subject of so much good fortune; and such a love, from so noble a woman, is certainly no common prize in this world of superficial attachments, and one too valuable to be lost. It is above all price to any man worthy of her. It is such love that redeems the world; for it is akin to that which saves the soul from sin."

"It ought not to be difficult to tell one who appreciates her, and yet I hesitate; for it will be against her will. I came into her secret through a transaction requiring my approval and signature. I have not her delicacy of feeling, and think I ought to tell, and yet I would not have her know—O, for God's sake save me this hard duty! Theo is my only sister and almost my only relative. Why need I say more? God forgive me, if I have wrongly interfered in this matter, and done more harm than good."

"What do you mean? You cannot mean——? No, impossible!"

"I'm rough, sir, and unused to such matters; but remember it is hard to see her wasting away. Her life is in your hands. Oh! this is terrible to you, I fear, and in me a grave mistake!"

He rushed from the room, and left me in dumb amazement. A thunderbolt from a clear sky would not have startled me more. What was there in me to call forth such love? I asked myself over and over. The idea seemed absurd, and yet absurdities had developed in the world before, and though I repeated, "Impossible, impossible," and declared, "There must be some mistake," the clearer I recalled my last conversation with Theo, the clearer came the conviction that I was the man. But what had I done to evoke her love? and what was I to do about it? Here was a dilemma.

I began to chastize myself for being thoughtless in my deportment towards her; and yet I could not recall one word or act, which could lead her to regard me other than a friend. I had frequently said to my mates, that it was of the nature of murder to deliberately win a girl's affections only to blast them; and here I was where I must save or blight the future of a very dear friend. I thought I had realized before how careful a young man should be of giving a wrong impression, but the danger was greater than I supposed; and I record this maze into which I

had fallen as a warning to others, who may read these pages.

Here I was with all my hopes, and perhaps those of another, in one hand, and the very life of a most estimable young lady in the other. Which should I choose? It was a terrible ordeal for weak human nature. No one, who has not stood where I stood, can have any adequate idea of the perplexity, the self-accusation and torture I suffered. The perspiration stood beaded upon my forehead. I clutched a chair, not for support merely, but that by some expression I might clear my brain for more thorough and exact thought. What if Ethel Blentwood, to whom I had probably revealed something of my feelings, had begun to regard me as my heart had so ardently craved! What if the future of two persons depended on me! Where then would lie the path of duty? For duty and right, I was clear, should be consulted, and not my own happiness.

But how could I know what injury I might be doing Ethel by turning to Theo? Ethel must know something of my feelings for her, and Theo must remember that I told her plainly of my love for another, though she knows not that that other is Ethel. If I knew Ethel would reject me, the line of duty would be plain, and, furthermore, I could not be unhappy in the great love of so noble a girl as Theodocia Thornton; but, and here was the rub, if the discovery should ever overtake me when too late to remedy it, that Ethel's life was being shortened on account of

my apparent treachery, the thought would kill me.

"O, God!" I cried in my heart, as I sank on my knees, "why am I in this seemingly wicked position, where I may do harm whichever way I turn? Forgive me if the fault be mine, and lead me through whatever punishment, if only I may undo any possible harm I have done. Wherever Thou leadest, I will go." In that surrender I felt that I should be guided.

I had arisen and was resting my head in my right hand, my elbow against the window-casing, when I heard the rustle of a lady's dress, and knew that Ethel was in the room. I turned, and, true to my heart's divination, there she was in all her grace and beauty advancing towards me, pale but calm. I took her extended hand tremblingly into mine, and held it while she said:

"It is very kind of you, Professor Bloomfield, to come to us in this hour of our great anxiety."

I wished to remind her that she was to call me Elbert, but the thought of Theo deterred me, and I tried to appear only as a sincere and grateful friend. I was congratulating her on her providential escape from the railroad catastrophe, when Dr. Lightheart was announced. Although the local doctors had done nobly, no one could take the place of the old family physician, in whose friendly skill and knowledge of the patient's power of endurance we all had confidence. His coming was a great relief to Ethel; for she felt sure that the very best that was in him, of brain

and heart and untiring study of the case, would be given her father ; and so felt we all.

He was soon at Dr. Blentwood's side, and we awaited his diagnosis as patiently as we could, and when he returned to us we looked to him eagerly for the verdict. He tried to look cheerful for Ethel's sake and said :

" Dr. Blentwood is hurt internally, but how seriously I cannot at present determine. I am going to take the whole care of him to-night, and watch every symptom. There is no immediate danger, but I will not leave him until I know what I can do for him."

A conscientious physician, who will not prescribe until he knows the condition of the patient he is prescribing for, is a great blessing to the world ; and this thought, awakened by Dr. Light-heart, has never left me.

He ordered us all to bed, assuring us he could watch the patient better alone with nothing to distract his attention. " I must look through that man," he said, " and so must need concentrate every faculty and power I possess."

This was hardly a hyperbolic expression. He had cultivated his powers of perception to such a degree of intensity that, with his scientific knowledge, it was almost literally true, that he could see into the human system. Every faculty we possess, is susceptible of improvement, and mental sight is no exception. It is a part of our heritage, if we will take it, to think more, feel more, see more, and be more as time wears on.

We do not know the alphabet of our powers yet. It seems miraculous to talk with a person a thousand miles away by means of the telephonic wire; but it is not nonsense to say that the time may come, by living up to our privileges, when mind will communicate with mind without the aid of telephonic appliances, or perhaps of even physical speech. Were we sufficiently spiritual, we might not need to wait the end of the world to be "caught up" into celestial society; we could see through the veil, and be literally with the Lord now.

Miss Blentwood retired that night, as we all did, feeling comforted and confident, knowing that her father was in safe hands. Poor girl! she needed that night's rest to prepare her for what was to be revealed the next morning, when she and I reached the door of the room adjoining that of her father, which we did at the same moment. It was ajar, and there, opposite, sat Dr. Lightheart, so deeply absorbed that he did not notice us, the tears rolling down his kindly, sympathetic face.

We stood still for a minute, till he looked up, and then Ethel advanced tremblingly, fell down at his knee, and wept silently. The good doctor bowed his head to hers, and, with one hand gently resting on her head, whispered softly:

"He will not suffer much, his mind will be clear, and you will have him perhaps a week longer, and, when he goes, you will not feel that you have lost your father."

She struggled with her tears a little longer, and then raised a victorious face, the most spiritual I ever beheld, and, with a grateful look at the faithful doctor, she passed into the sick room. What thoughts were there exchanged with her father, and the greater Father above, we knew not ; for we felt that one room in that house was, at that time, too sacred for us to enter.

CHAPTER XLII.

"BLOODY NIGGER."

I FOUND it impossible to sit, and so, passing down into the parlor, I was pacing up and down the long room, my image reflected by mirrors from every side, giving the impression that there were many others as excited as myself, when, hearing a scream, I opened the dining-room door. As I did so, Polly Durgin, whom I had almost forgotten, came rushing in from the kitchen, wildly gesticulating and exclaiming, "Bloody nigger! O—oh!"

Sure enough, there lay a negro on the kitchen-floor with evident traces of blood on his forehead; and what was my surprise to recognize in the prostrate form, Tom, the faithful servant of the Blentwoods!

"Are you hurt, Tom?" I asked, feeling his pulse; and, ascertaining that he had probably fainted, I gave directions to Polly, and then went quietly for Dr. Lightheart, who soon had him restored to consciousness.

Taking him by the hand, I said:

"Tom, my good fellow, what brought you here in such a plight?"

"Seems like I dunno perzackly. Please gimme sumfin ter chaw. Cup-er-tea'd feel mighty ticklish. I's clean plumb gone wid vacancy."

Polly brought him a lunch, and, soon after, a cup of smoking tea, and then I impatiently renewed my inquiry.

"Do tell us, Tom, what has happened to you?"

"It happen' las' night, sah, and it seem long time since de las' meal got away from me, and de smell ob dis yere beckfus make me feel powerful glad dat I has room for it. I is empty's er gun barrel arter de charge am fired off."

He ate voraciously as if starved, but, after swallowing two or three cups of strong tea, his tongue was loosed, and his eyes opened wide.

"I bigin to 'cognize whar I be and de concatenation ob events. I's powerful exercise wid pleasure to seen you faces once mo', Perfessor Boomfield and Dr. Lightheart. Peerd like I'd nebber git heyah nohow; but de Lord am too much for de debble ebery time," and Tom began to grin and lift his shoulders in high glee over the way he outwitted the devil.

Dropping his knife and fork, as if struck with a sudden recollection, he put his hand into his breast pocket, and then into one still more interior, when, wild with excitement, he exclaimed, "De letter am gone sure, and I is no mo' worthy to be called a messenger ob de Lord. De debble smarter den I tuk him, or, may be—I mus' go right back whar I had de squabble wid 'im."

He rose to go, groaning under his sense of unfaithfulness, but I detained him.

"Tom, did any one entrust you with a letter to me?"

"She did, sah; she trusted me, and I——"

"Who trusted you?"

"Missus Elison, and she charge me mos' on her dyin' bed to gib it to nobody but you, and when she'd got one foot on de golden stair, I started wid the letter in heyah," striking his breast.

"What became of that letter?"

"Dat be jes' zakly what bustifies my comprehension, sah. When I travel a good smart piece, and it were mos' dark, a team obertuk me, and went by like Jehu. De man's face were covered up wid him coat collar and hat, and I thunked by myself, What if dat be Stockmire? Ob cose it ain't though, and yet I was afeared, for I spicioned de letter had sumfin to do wid 'im.

"Wall, de road tuk me fro' some woods, and, when furd nuf in to be dark, I seed what peered like a horse and wagin side de road, and fore I knowed it I tuk to my heels, but sumfin hit me on de head, and I din know no mo' for a spell. When I wake up, man say way down him froat, like bullfrog, if I stir he blow my brain out. I axed him what for he want me, and he say money. Dat ar' revive me; for I fort ef he doan want de letter, he be welcome to de fifty cents; and so I comed away mighty tickled. But now I's tetotolum obfuscated whudder de letter drop out some

way, or whudder de debble tuk it for to punish me fer—fer my sin."

"What sin, Tom?"

"Dunno, 'less cause I look too smilin' for a married man on a purty yaller gal I met on de road. Yaller be my special takin' color, and she look so peert and cheery! But I come right away, sah, and din't roll de sweet morsel ober in my heart."

"It was Stockmire, and not the devil, who took your letter," broke in Dr. Lightheart.

"Wall, doctor, if Stockmire got de letter, and de debble got Stockmire, peers like all de same, don't it?"

"Not much difference, Tom; but I withdraw my assertion. I don't say who the scamp is, that robbed you."

"Perhaps I were puffed up wid pride, and de Lord wanted ter spank de wind outer me. What kin I do, gemmen?"

"You can watch and search wherever you have any suspicions," I said guardedly, "and here is five dollars for what you have tried to do thus far."

He took the money with widely dilating eyes; but before he could express his emotions, Miss Blentwood came into the kitchen, and exclaimed, "Is that you, Tom? and what is the matter?"

"It is I, Miss Ethel, and tank de Lord you is safe. We were mighty skeered at fust dat you bof were smash up; but de report were conterdicted."

"Father was hurt, and you shall see him presently." She got a basin of water, and washed the blood from his forehead with her own hands, and, covering the bruise with courtplaster, she took him to her father's bedside. We did not follow, but as he left the kitchen, we caught the murmured words, "angel ob de Lord," and when he returned he was weeping sadly. He had prayed with the doctor at the latter's request, and now, heart-broken with fear, like the elders in separating from Paul, that he should see his face no more, he burst out in his grief:

"I doan see how de Lord kin stan' de dear pleadin' face ob Miss Ethel! Ef I were on de frone, peers like, I'd raise de good man up quicker'n lightnin', ef it busted me, and I had ter pick up de plaguy splinters and build my calkerlations all ober agin! I say, it peers like; but I is a poor fool before de Lord, and I 'spects He laugh at my heterdoxy, and will sometime make us all laugh when we discubber how much wiser He lub us den we lub ourselves. He knows I is a po' silly coot; but He pity me, 'cause I feels so bad in my ignorance. De dear doctor! De dear Miss Ethel!"

His voice choked, and he could say no more. As he was not needed, he could not be prevailed upon to even wait for a more hearty breakfast; but, provided with a generous lunch, he started homeward, declaring if he could not find the letter on the way back, he would follow his "spicions under de eye ob de Lord widout fear."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A SUPPOSED ENGAGEMENT.

AFTER breakfast Theodore Thornton or Thede, as he was called, whispered that his sister was sitting up and would see me. I went to my room, and in silent prayer, asked to be guided aright in all I should do or say.

On my way to Theo, I managed to get one more look at Ethel, while my heart was hers, and before it might be bound to another. I would have given worlds, I thought, had I them to give, could I know what her feelings were towards me.

"Does she see how I have silently loved her? and does she expect me to avow it? and will she be disappointed and suffer if I do not?" These and other burning questions surged through my brain, and stirred my heart, as I looked longingly after her for some sign or token for my guidance, ere it should be too late. My destiny seemed to me to be hanging in the balance, which a few minutes would decide irrevocably and forever. She looked pale, doubtless thinking of her father, but no less beautiful on that account. Indeed, her pathetic, spiritual face seemed all the more glorified as if it had caught something of the light which illumines the immortal fields beyond.

"She would never suffer on my account like Theo," I thought; for she is stronger to conquer disappointment, but more especially because she could never love me like Theo. She is too supremely lovely to find sufficient attractions in me," and I turned away with a sigh and a benumbing pain in my heart, which words cannot describe.

"God, help me to do just right," was my prayer, as I stopped at Theo's door, which was slightly ajar, and entered in answer to her voice. She certainly looked very attractive, even angelic, and it seemed to me there must be some mistake in Thede's intimation that I was the ideal object of her devotion. If Thede was right, she must have got too high an impression of me, and it was my first duty to undeceive her if possible.

As I have elsewhere explained, Theo and Ethel had attractive qualities very much in common. Their points of resemblance in disposition and in their innocent, winsome ways were wonderful; and I was conscious that I liked Theo immensely, and that had I not met Ethel, that liking might easily ripen into love, especially under the warmth of her own great affection.

After we had exchanged greetings and little mutual confidences, in which she revealed some traits strikingly reminding me of Ethel, I exclaimed in a burst of frankness, "Were there ever before in this world two such delightful creatures as you and Miss Blentwood!"

"Is she the one? Is Ethel the one?" Theo

repeated eagerly, her face all aglow with interest. She raised her hand trembling with excitement, as if to wrest the truth from me. "If she is the one I am the happiest person alive."

She does not love me after all, I thought, and strange to say, I felt a twinge of disappointment. If Theo did not, then Ethel could not, and I felt myself rejected by both.

"Are you then so eager to get rid of me?" I asked unreasonably, forgetting for the moment that I was supposed to be ignorant of her love for me.

"I?" she asked, looking at me greatly puzzled. "Have you forgotten the conversation we had on a former occasion?"

"No."

"You then loved one to whom you had not proposed?"

"Yes."

"Well, now my question was simply this, Is Ethel Blentwood the one? I call her Ethel, for we have become the most intimate and dearest of friends."

"If you two could not love each other," I said, trying to smile, "I should think the world was going back to chaos, and that such propositions in Euclid as, 'Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other,' are fundamentally wrong, and that there is no such thing as a self-evident truth."

"That does not answer my question, please," she urged, half smiling, yet with an anxious, wistful look.

"Well, what if I did have the hardihood to love Ethel Blentwood——"

"Did? Do you not love her still?"

"Well, what if I do? A cat can look at a king; but that does not imply that the king takes any notice of the cat. My love, however, is not an impertinence so long as I do not trouble her with it."

"Why not trouble her with it, pray?"

"It would be foolish to expect her to respond favorably, and I fear it would be wrong to ask it of one so superior to me every way—so worthy of the wealthiest as well as the wisest and best."

"You do not estimate yourself at your proper value, unlike most young men I know."

"Do you mean to imply that Ethel Blentwood could love me?"

"I don't see how she could help it, if she felt sure of you. Why do you doubt?"

"Because—because I think if—if you do not, she cannot; for you two are strangely blended in my ideal. You belong together. It is hard to separate you."

She looked up at me amazed, and yet pleased, as she saw I was not trifling. The color came and went, the golden clasp on her bosom rose and fell, and visibly shook with the conflict of her emotions. She dropped her eyes, but at length growing calm, looked up at me so frankly, so completely unreserved, and withal so affectionately, that I wanted to clasp her in my arms, and call her my—dear sister. I refrained, how-

ever, from the fear that I should use stronger terms, and, thus, perhaps, go beyond the leadings or requirements of Providence.

"I see," she said, "you wish me to interpret Ethel's feelings towards you. You are right in this, that our tastes are alike, and our hearts beat as one. What she loves I love, and, therefore, only one of us can marry, and that one cannot be myself."

Not knowing what I ought to say, but thinking of Thede's implication that her very life depended on me, I arose and walked the room. Stopping at length near her chair, and placing my left hand on her shoulder, I asked :

"If it be true that you two must love only the same person, why should you yield the wedding-ring to Ethel? Why not accept it yourself?"

"If I could, you mean;" and she smiled tenderly up at me. Closing her eyes for a moment, either to think or to hide them from me, she continued, "I think I can put my answer into three reasons: First, Ethel has the prospect of a long and helpful life, while my days are numbered; second, she could make the man of her choice more useful, and therefore, perhaps, more blessed than I could; and third, I should feel happier in her happiness, as well as more content with myself in the consciousness of doing right, than I otherwise could."

"You are an unselfish girl," I said warmly. "You will occupy a higher place in heaven than I. You deserve it. You are qualified for it."

Yes, you have the qualities that make heaven on the earth. Why not live, and make it?"

"I would if I could," she answered, sweetly puzzled. "Where and how shall I begin?"

"Begin with me, here and now," I replied, led on by great admiration and sympathy, by a desire to discharge my whole duty, by the luxury of self-sacrifice for another's welfare, by gratitude for her affection, and by a feeling closely akin to love. "You must not think of dying. The world needs you. Your friends need you. I need you. Live for me, if for no one else. Will you? Promise you will live for my sake." I took both of her hands in mine, and the consciousness that I was doing right thrilled me with content and happiness, as I waited her answer.

"May I not live for another's sake?" she asked, with a roguish twinkle in her moist eyes, referring to Ethel, though I did not then catch her meaning.

"Yes, for your sake and mine," was my answer.

"I feel as if I must cry a little," she said, with a trembling voice. "Will you let me cry on your shoulder?"

"Certainly," I replied, drawing her to me; "cry all you wish. When she at last dried her eyes, and looked up, she asked:

"Do you think me childish?"

"No," I answered, "it is even noble to cry. The shedding of tears is something the lower animals cannot do. Jesus wept, and He was the highest ideal of humanity. I should be afraid of

a woman who could not cry, and I hope you will cry in the same place whenever you feel like it."

She laughed a happy, bird-like little laugh, and said gratefully, "I thought men did not like to see women cry. I thank you for bearing with me. I appreciate your kindness, and am myself again now."

"I hope you will have no cause for weeping, except for joy on your own account, or in sympathy for others. But you have not answered my question. Will you start a heaven on the earth, and live for my sake?"

"Does that depend on my own volition?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes."

"Then I will accomplish my mission, if you will let me have my own way about it."

"You shall follow your own sweet will fully and freely. Gladden us all by getting well, and I will be obedient to your every wish."

"I thank you," she said simply, though affectionately, "and now let us talk of another matter?"

Not appearing to notice my surprise at this anti-romantic climax, she asked, "Do you know one of Dr. Blentwood's parishioners by the name of Stockmire?"

"Somewhat."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"I do not know."

"You doubt him?"

"Perhaps unjustly."

"Well, Ethel has showed me a letter from him, on which I wish your opinion, as she wished mine. Mr. Stockmire writes he cannot take as final Ethel's refusal of her hand in marriage, and urges her to consider well her father's lost fortune, and his precarious pastorate, which may terminate any day, should he withhold his aid, but which, supported as it always would be, by him as his son-in-law, might be prolonged indefinitely. He closes by trusting, that, for her sake as well as that of her father, who losing his present pastorate, would be too old and feeble to command another, she would respond favorably to this, his last appeal. He would give her two days to decide, and then, if not heard from, he should let things take their course."

"The rascal!" I said, springing up from Theo's chair, on which I was sitting. "She must loathe the reptile. What does she say! What——"

"Please be not so excited," interrupted Theo, with a meaning smile and a still more meaning little shake of her head. "Your judgment may not be disinterested; but I think you are right. A man, who would bring a girl's father into his plea for her hand the way Mr. Stockmire does, is—is all you pronounce him to be. Ethel asked me if duty to her father required her to make such a sacrifice. She trembled as she asked it; for she loves her father, and would do everything she deemed right to save him pain or add to his happiness."

"And what *did* you tell her?" I asked, unable

to wait longer, and not realizing that Theo might be testing my feelings for Ethel.

"Ah! you are interested, I see," she answered, looking at me slyly, and yet sympathetically. "I admire your impatience. Well, I told her I would help remove the sense of duty, and then she could let her heart decide. I went—for my sympathies made me strong—I went to the safe where Thede and I keep some of our valuables, and, taking three thousand dollars in Government bonds, I placed them in her hands."

"Noble soul!" I cried, taking my seat again on the arm of her chair, and looking at her admiringly. "How can the world spare such a blessing as you are to everybody?"

"Oh! that was not a noble act," she answered, deprecatingly. "I fear it was one of the most selfish things I ever did."

"I would like to know how you figure that out," I interjected.

"For," she went on as if I had not spoken, "I loved her from the very first, thoroughly, exhaustively, if you know what that means, and craved her love in return—craved it with almost a death hunger, and I wished to bind her to me forever, as well as to save her for her own sake."

"I do not wonder," I said, enthusiastically, "for——"

She put her hand on my mouth with, "Tell that to Ethel."

"Well," I said, patting her flushed cheek, "do let me wish the world were full of just such self-

ish creatures as you are. And now tell me how Ethel received your kindness, or selfishness, if you so term it."

"O, she refused it until she saw she was making me unhappy, when she accepted ; and then we embraced and kissed each other, and cried and laughed, and finally thanked God together, she for the rescue as she called it, and both of us for a God-given friend. I do believe Ethel Blentwood is the best girl that ever lived ; and I feel so exalted by her love—so happy in it ! And—and then there is your own, good, kind, noble, generous self ! I have both of you, the very best of your kind. I have abundant reason to be grateful. And Oh ! I am in ecstasies of delight at the prospect of a goodly mission before my promotion to a higher service, where, at the proper time, I will wait and watch at the gate for Ethel and for you. And now, good-by for a while ; for I think I can rest with pleasant dreams, day-dreams though they be."

CHAPTER XLIV.

CHARLEY AND I.

AS I left the room, Theodore Thornton met me in the hall, and announced that Dr. Lightheart's brother had arrived and wished to see me. I found Charley in the parlor walking the floor impatiently, and he sprang to me with his old-time, delightful greeting.

"I have seen Ethel and her father," he said, "and I fear she will soon have to find in you a father as well as a friend."

A groan escaped me at the thought of being debarred from that privilege. Charley took it only as a token of sympathy, and went on:

"You need not fear Stockmire; he has married Miss Elison, and, with her parents dead, he is now in the coveted management of all the Elison estate."

"Well, well!" I exclaimed, "When did that take place?"

"Last evening, and he has sold his business and is to go west at once, doubtless full of dreams of coming millions on a cattle ranch, which is the promising business just now."

"You surprise me. The movement is so sudden, so extraordinary!"

"It is high time he's off. His popularity is on the wane. People are putting together his controversy with Deacon Toper, in which it is now believed Stockmire lied; his taking pay fraudulently out of the proceeds of a church fair for his own dishes, which he, himself broke by his own carelessness; his selling bonds, which he must have known to be worthless, though it cannot be proved; his dishonest stand against Dr. Blentwood, pretending to be his friend, when he was at the bottom of all the mischief; and finally, his obtaining money under false pretences, to say nothing of whisperings and suspicions of something too dark to be believed——"

"I cannot think he committed murder," I broke in, "though the three deaths naturally raise a suspicion. Stockmire had two gods, money and position, and his object with the pastor was to line his own pockets, and, at the same time, reduce Dr. Blentwood to penury and dependence, and secure the hand of Ethel through her sense of duty to her father." I related what the reader already knows.

"He is a worse knave than I supposed!" Charley exclaimed. "And that reminds me, there may be something worth studying in these bits of a letter Tom made me promise to deliver to you."

He poured the contents of an envelope on a table, and we worked on the pieces for over an



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hour, arranging and rearranging ; but so many bits being gone, we could make out only parts of sentences. On one piece was "Mrs. E.," which, we inferred, might be the signature to a letter from Mrs. Elison. Other pieces indicated a financial statement by Mr. Stockmire, in which the names of Elison and Blentwood appear with the selling to them of Vt. C. bonds, at a net profit of \$10,000 ; but we could not make out a statement sufficiently clear to prove a fraudulent transaction, however morally convinced of his rascality. Miss Blentwood was called in and asked how many bonds her father bought of Mr. Stockmire. She only knew that nearly all his means were invested in them, even to a large mortgage on their house, probably all the house would sell for in the present financial depression.

"When did you learn they were worthless?" I asked.

"The evening before we left home," was her answer.

"Ah!" I said, "that accounts for your agitated condition the next morning at breakfast."

"You noticed it, then! Well, it was wholly on father's account I was troubled. He does not yet know his loss, and I do not wish him to know. I prefer Mr. Stockmire should go unpunished rather than disturb father's few remaining days by the thought that I am left penniless. I am not destitute, however, thanks to a very dear friend," referring to Theo.

Cut off from the only source of information available, and as Stockmire was about to leave the state, we felt forced to drop the whole matter, and leave him in the hands of Providence, believing that in time his real character would be revealed.

"And now, Elbert, my 'boy,'" said Charley brightening, and placing a hand on my knee familiarly, as we were alone again, "let us talk about a matter, where I am living mostly these days. Congratulate me on my forthcoming promotion on the paper. It is a worldly fact, I know; but it stands in the outer court of my soul, prophetic of paradise; for promotion means more money, and more money means housekeeping! As soon as I am advanced in pay, I shall run for the steam cars pointing towards wedded bliss. You know Carrie has consented to begin at the foot of the hill, and climb up with me; and when the little more pay comes, I shall fly to my Carrie, and then to you. Have the noose ready to slip over our heads at once."

"No immediate danger of a promotion?" I asked, smiling at his half-earnest and half-mock enthusiasm.

"It may come to-morrow, and if it does, steam-power will be too slow in taking me to Carrie, the first and only real Carrie of the ages; the town clerk will be too slow in writing out the certificate, and the distance thence to you will seem leagues too long!"

"Carrie's folk will wish to give her a home wedding and reception, will they not, Charley?"

"A reception is all right. I can issue 'At Homes' after my happiness is secured; but a wedding party implies delay, and delay is suspended life. What! do you suppose I am going to dally outside of domestic felicity after the only hinderance to our marriage is removed? I am not the boy to rush headlong, panting for breath, in my hurry to reach heaven's door, and then stand shivering on the step with my hand on the door knob! No sir! The moment my hand is on the knob, the knob turns, the door to double blessedness flies open, and I am within! Every second of felicity in this world is worth saving—that's my motto; and, whenever and wherever I see any particles of bliss lying round loose, I am going to pick them up, if I have a right to them."

"An excellent motto, Charley, if rightly apprehended," I said, after getting control of myself. "It enfolds a whole volume of sermons. If people would appreciate and use every opportunity of giving and receiving pleasure, this world would quickly become a paradise. The world has advanced in science and the arts, and general intelligence, much faster than it has in learning how to be happy. Sympathy and spirituality lag behind; and half the cruelty and half the unhappiness of the world comes from sheer, stupid incapacity to put one's self in another's place."

"Good, my dear Elbert! Now put yourself in

Ethel's place. Her father is about to take a long journey never to return, and then she will be lonely indeed. Make her and that anxious father both happy by marrying her before he goes."

"Your application isn't the logical sequence to my comment on your motto, I think; but if it is, you forget, Charley, that it takes two, and in this case three, to make a bargain, and that the standard of excellence with Ethel Blentwood and her father is very, very high—too high for me to reach."

"I forget nothing. They are both great and good, I know, and so are you. Oh, don't interrupt me with that deprecating look and gesture. I'll take your opinion on everything except yourself. Don't you suppose I know the estimation in which you are held? If you wasn't as blind as a bat, you would see that Ethel loves you, and that nothing would please her father more——"

"Oh, don't, Charley!" I interrupted, "you are cutting me as with a knife."

"I am only trying to cut away the films from your eyes to give you a glimpse, and then a walk-over, straight into heaven—a heaven below, I mean. Is it a torture to take a peep into unlimited happiness?"

"You know not what you are saying," I said, rising and walking the room, trembling with emotion. "The subject is too painful, too sacred to trifle with. Let us talk of something to our profit."

"For once, at least, I am serious," he replied,

coming forward and placing both hands on my shoulders. "Mark my words: Ethel loves you, and expects you to propose. You have given her reason to expect it, and if you do not, the first sin of your life, I believe, lies at your door."

"Charley Lightheart!" I cried, grasping his arms in the intensity of my feelings, "you and I are near and dear friends, and I charge you, if merely surmising, to take back those words, and save me from a life-long sorrow."

"What can you mean, old friend? Don't I know how you have loved her? And now do you not welcome her love in return? Are you not the same Elbert? How can I recall words truly spoken? And why should they not make you glad?"

"Charley," I answered, slowly and solemnly, "what if duty calls in another direction, and the very life of a noble girl hangs on my willingness to put the wedding-ring on her finger?"

"Is it possible you could give another girl reason?"

"No, no, Charley; not knowingly. Indeed, I expressly told her (when she was extolling someone I had no reason to infer was myself) that I loved another. It has always been a matter of sacred honor with me to give no false impression. I speak in confidence, because you require an explanation, and I trust in your honor not to repeat it. Remember, I am not to be commiserated. Theo is worth a dozen of me, and will make me abundantly happy, if I can be assured

I have done no harm to Ethel, to whom I may have unconsciously revealed my heart. God bless them both."

"Ah! it is Theo, is it? She is indeed a noble girl; but I do want you to marry Ethel for her sake, for her father's sake, for your sake and mine, and for the sake of the infinite fitness of things; and I do not think she can forget you any easier than Theo, though, being stronger, she may more easily conquer and control her outward appearance. I believe she can love as truly, as tenaciously, and even more heroically."

"Her equal she may doubtless so love, but I am not her equal; besides, what can I do, Charley? I do not deserve either of these girls. God help me to know and to do exactly what is right. I see no way but to go right on as Providence seems to direct, hoping for the best."

We were silent for a few minutes, when Mr. Thornton came in to take us to dinner. He had looked in upon Theo, and his face was beaming with gladness. Casting a grateful glance at me, he said, "The day of miracles is not passed! Theo says she is to dine with us to-day, and is more like her old self than for a long time."

CHAPTER XLV.

THEO IMPARTS A SECRET.

THEDE had hardly finished, when Theo entered the room with a pleasant greeting, and a cordial welcome to Charley, and walked to the dining-room with as firm a step, apparently, as if she had not been ill. She took my offered arm, she said, "as an ornament, and not for use." She was very chatty at table, and entertained us with her varied and pleasing conversation.

As we rose from dinner, and lingered a little behind the others, she squeezed my arm, and, looking up at me archly, remarked in a low voice :

"I have a surprise for you, and am so happy over it, I don't know what to do with myself, or when and how to tell you. I think I must roll it as a precious morsel under my tongue, and enjoy its sweetness as long as possible."

"Will the sweetness exhale as soon as you have parted with the secret?"

"No, indeed! but the surprise will."

"Well, now you have warned me, I shall be fortified against surprise."

"Against the fact, but not against the kind. I have taken Ethel and her father into my con-

fidence somewhat—just a little bit, to make sure it would not kill them!—did it when you and Charley were entertaining each other. And I shall break the news to you—oh, sometime!”

“Is it something dreadful, Theo? Had I better take chloroform as a preparation? Is it something that will come suddenly or gradually? And will it last long?”

“Ah! how much will you give to know?” with a tantalizing look and a pretty shake of the head. “Oh—Oh! I am afraid I shall have to tell right off. It is too great happiness to keep from you any longer. You are too good a boy. After Charley leaves, come into my sitting-room.”

We had now reached the long parlor, where Ethel excused herself, and, bidding Charley good-bye, went to her father. Charley left soon on “urgent business” for his paper, and Theo, informing her brother she had something to tell him by and bye, went to her room, leaving Thede and me alone together.

“I think I can guess what she has to communicate,” said he, rising with his big hand extended; “for no one but you could have wrought such a miracle in my sister’s condition, and I wish to give you a brother’s grip of thanks. Have I not a brother in you?”

“You have,” I answered, returning his warm grasp, “and I will do all in my power to make Theo’s life a happy one as long as Heaven loans her to earth, and, should I outlive her, I shall ever honor and cherish her memory.”

"May the God you serve bless you both," he said earnestly, and left the room. At the door, he managed to add, "I leave you both to better company than I can furnish."

I remained alone a few minutes, lost in my own reflections, and then, recalling Theo's command, I tapped at her door. She came forward as I entered, and, taking me by the hand, led me to the sofa, and seating herself by my side, looked up into my face with that charming confidence and sweetness, which she and Ethel both had in common, and beaming with pleasure at what she was about to communicate, said:

"I have good news for you—awfully good news."

"Awful and yet good! So good I shall stand in awe of it, I suppose?"

"Yes, bordering on the sublime, you know. At any rate, it is tremendous, stupendous, magnificent, perfectly lovely!—just what ought to be."

"I am afraid you are raising my expectations too high. Do divide your secret with me before I burst with curiosity."

"Well, first I must exact a promise that you will not fly up through the roof never to come down again!"

"I promise."

"Prepare yourself for the shock, then. Here it is—Ethel Blentwood loves you and you only!" And she looked into my face as if to read my every emotion.

"How do you know that? I asked.

"O, not from her own lips; but I saw it in her eyes."

"And you are jealous, and are going to shoot somebody?"

"Do you see the green-eyed monster in my eyes? It would be there if you were not loved by her." She scanned my face more closely.

"What! do you wish her to love me? Aren't you afraid that will make me love her?"

"You do love her already."

"That is past tense. Let the dead bury their dead."

"Yes, if dead; but this happens to be a corpse a little too lively to submit to burial."

"I thought it understood between us, that that particular past should be buried and forgotten; and here you are raking off the ashes from an old fire to see if there are any live coals, and fanning them into a flame by telling me that Ethel loves me. Are you testing me to see if I can——"

"No, no! You would be as true as steel wherever you had set your promise. I know that. But I want you to love Ethel Blentwood with all your heart—with all the intensity of your being."

"And not love you?"

"I want a place in both of your hearts—a loving and trusted sister's place."

"And that is all?"

"All."

"Then it is true, is it, that you do not love me?"

"O, no! That is not true. I must be frank with you. I really believe I could immolate my body on an altar of fire, if thereby I could add to your happiness, and at the same time, please the Master. Your blessedness would take away all the pain of physical torture."

"My God! What'am I to receive such love? And yet you are willing and anxious to give me up to another?"

"I would give you up to no one but Ethel."

"And why even to her?"

"Because I love you better than I do myself, and want to see you make the most of yourself in the line of usefulness as well as happiness; and Ethel is the angel sent down from Heaven expressly to meet all your requirements, and help you accomplish your mission."

I took both of her hands. "Do you think I can so easily give you up and lose so great a love, the like of which I could never hope to see again? I am too selfish for that."

"Too generous, you mean. You would be equal to any sacrifice for my welfare, and I know you would love me dearly, were there no Ethel; but there is an Ethel, my ideal, my nobler self, the perfect expression, like you, of what I would be, but am not, and, knowing her to be so much better fitted to bring out the affection, the glory—all that is highest and deepest in you for your own good as well as others', I want you to marry her. In so doing you will marry my true self—Theo at her best."

"And neither retain, nor gain, a Theo's love."

"Yes, you will retain my love cleansed and purified from all earthly dross, and you will gain a love equal, if not superior, to mine. I have sounded the depths of her noble nature far enough to believe that she may be yours with all the wealth of her being, so abundantly, so richly endowed—yours for the asking."

"Theo, the very sacrifice you would make only reveals what a treasure you are, and draws me closer to you. You are too good to lose."

"You will not lose me. I shall look upon you as the husband of my spiritualized and better self, and I want the privilege of being a trusted, confidential friend to both of you. Ethel reads me, and knows me, too well to be jealous of the sister's love I propose to give you both henceforth."

"Theo," I said, looking earnestly into her eyes, "do you mean it? Do you really and truly wish me to marry Ethel Blentwood? And would you live just as long, and just as happily? Speak out freely, frankly, right from the centre of your great, good, true heart. To ever know that you vary now a hair's breadth from the truth in your answer, would kill me. I cannot see you sacrificed, and be myself happy."

"Call it not sacrifice; for I can be happy only in seeing you the happy husband of happy, confiding, tenderly loving and glorious Ethel Blentwood. I speak the truth."

Her face seemed transfigured, as she looked at me, her very soul shining through it clear, pure,

translucent and transparent as the sunlight which fell at that moment on her brow, as if to crown her for the victory she had attained over self. It was a marvelous exhibition of the higher nature over the lower.

How did she reach a state of unselfishness so beautiful and so commanding? The Darwinian might answer, that she had thrown off the brute-inheritance, which is always selfish, by developing the kindly, sympathetic side of her nature, and, thereby, risen above the animal into a spiritual life. The Christian could answer, that the secret of her victory was something, which, in the language of Jesus to Peter, "flesh and blood" had not revealed unto her, and that her attainment was clearly the fruit of the Spirit, which, Paul tells us, is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," or self-control.

But the question forces itself upon us, Why should such goodness, great and glorious as it is, be so exceptional? Is it not within the possible reach of every human being? Is it not rather marvelous that in these last days of the nineteenth century, since the planting of Christianity on the earth, that, instead of one person, there are not hundreds exhibiting the full fruit of the Spirit? I venture the assertion, that when Christianity, as portrayed in the person of Jesus, shall be better studied and appreciated, there will be a great revolution in Christian methods, and in the personnel of the Christian church.

Then the dispositional man, or beauty of character, will be looked upon as the safest exponent of his creed, as a follower of Jesus, the Nazarene. Creed-worshippers doubtless believe they are following Him; but are they, except from afar? Do they exhibit his love, his self-sacrificing spirit, his sweet temper, his considerate attention and condescension? Faith in a creed may not be faith in Him. Jesus says, Follow Me, and to follow Him is to pattern after Him.

But to our story. Can the reader imagine my feelings, as I looked upon Theo's glowing face? Her assurance that my first and real love was reciprocated, made me long to fly to Ethel and tell her, in her hour of sorrow, how dearly I loved her, and would lift the burdens of life from her; and then, again, it seemed awful to forsake Theo, who had revealed such devotion—such exalted traits of character. How would her self-denial affect her health and happiness in the future, if I acquiesced in it? Would there be no reaction to her enthusiasm, no coming regret?

"How can I leave you?" I asked, "or be happy in the thought of having left you, however blissful my union with Ethel might otherwise be?"

"Oh! you need not, must not pity me. Know you not that the happier you and Ethel are in each other's love, the happier I shall be? Ever since learning that Ethel was the one, I have been satisfied and glad in the thought of your union. Everything is just as it should be, and we shall all be happy, gloriously happy. Remem-

ber you promised to let me have my own way, and the only way I can start the little heaven you asked for is to bring you and Ethel together. Any other course would be misery, and, therefore, foolish, suicidal, wicked."

The rising tides within me overflowed my eyes, and Theo, pulling my head down, said sympathetically, "There is no reason why a brother should not weep on his sister's shoulder!" and I did weep and felt better for it; and let no one think to blame me, or to belittle the act, until able to put himself or herself in my place. The trial to a sensitive moral nature was tremendous.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A REAL ENGAGEMENT.

AT length the mists of doubt and uncertainty cleared away, revealing the path of right and duty for me to tread, though I felt none of the assurance Theo possessed, that I should be accepted by Ethel.

Theo, in raptures of anticipation, exclaimed, "I can hardly wait for the joyous consummation. Delays are dangerous. You must see Ethel this very afternoon. She must not know, certainly at present, that I have ever had anything but a sister's love for you, or she would refuse you for my sake, which would be a disaster all round. My hopes of a satisfactory life depend now on realizing the happy and useful home you and she can create, together with what I may be able to contribute. I will go at once and take her place at her father's bedside, and send her to the garden, where she may enjoy the fragrant air and sunshine. She needs them, and she needs you. There is an arbor there, if the sun is too hot!"

There was a pleased, a joyous look in her sparkling eyes, as she raised them to mine, and then Theo Thornton went on her errand of exalted love.

I took my hat and went out, not knowing whither I went, and scarcely knowing whether in the body or out, my spirit flitting, now into the past and now into the future, leaving my body to guide itself as best it could, with little more than the mechanism of animal life. I walked on the front piazza, and then on the lawn, and finally gravitated towards a little grotto leading, unexpectedly, through a covered way, to the flower-garden. I was not yet fully conscious where I was, being in a day-dream or visionary mood, lost to everything but the world in which lived Ethel and Theo.

I came to myself on entering the grotto, its stones, its mosses, its shells and ferns, kept cool from the slow dripping of a concealed water pipe, attracting me to its refreshing shade and beauty. At what appeared to be the end of the cavern, and artfully hidden by rock-work, was an opening into a long grape arbor; and here a sight met my eyes, which made me feel for an instant that I was in the presence of a supernatural visitant; and I could only wonder whether Heaven held anything more beautiful.

At the other end of the grapery, into which I was looking, where a golden ray of sunlight rested on her head and brow, stood Ethel Blentwood in a snow-white dress, with one arm raised above her head; the sleeve, made for comfort, falling back and displaying a round, white arm; her graceful figure framed in beautiful contrast with the surrounding green; her head and neck splendidly

poised ; the resplendent color seeming to mount and play over her finely-cut features, as if delighted to do duty there ; her large, lustrous eyes raised, and her ruby lips slightly parted, as if in prayer, or as if seeing a vision which surprised and delighted her ; all combining to make a picture supremely lovely—so lovely that I felt like falling at her feet in worship. She seemed too angelic to be of this world.

“Is it possible,” I queried, “that she can love a poor mortal like me, of so much coarser clay ?”

It staggered belief, and I felt the weight of great misgivings. I had walked so softly she did not hear my approach. I stood irresolute for a moment, whether to retreat or go on ; but finally, unable to control myself any longer, I stepped heavily to call her attention and then exclaimed :

“O, Miss Blentwood ! Stay just as you are—don’t stir, please, and let me look at you a little nearer.”

Though somewhat startled at first, she obeyed, and as I drew near, smilingly asked, in her effort to conquer her blushes, “Was I statuesque ?”

“You must let me bring a photographer and have you taken in that position,” I replied. “The picture ought to be permanently preserved. I should value it so much, Miss Blentwood.”

“Why do you call me Miss Blentwood ?” she asked demurely. “I thought you were to call me Ethel.”

“You looked so spiritual, so far above and

beyond me, I could not feel worthy to use that familiar title."

"I cannot think you would seriously banter me in just this way," she said, dropping her eyes more perplexed than annoyed; and yet, how can you, from whom I have learned so much that is noble and spiritually uplifting, feel as your language inditates?"

"Dear Miss Blentwood!—Miss Ethel, I mean—you have no idea how heavenly you looked. I felt like John on the isle of Patmos, when he fell down at the feet of his angelic guide to worship him. And this is not the first time I have felt so in your presence, though never so much as now. Oh! if I were higher, nobler, more worthy—if my spirit shone as purely, as beautifully through all my features and acts, as does yours, I would not only dare to call you Ethel, but dear Ethel, and even ask you to be my Ethel—and—and—selfish and bold as it seems in me, I must ask it any way." Grasping her hands impulsively, and looking earnestly and pleadingly into her face, I added, "Can you—will you be my own dear Ethel?"

I waited, the spirit of compelling love pervading me, and speaking more powerfully than words. She did not speak, but two tears gathered, and I asked, "Are these the tears of pity and refusal?"

I felt certain that a nature so transparent would speak frankly the exact truth as far as she could interpret it, from the very center of her being. When she found her voice, she answered:

"They are only tears of gratitude. I have loved

you from the very first, and love has only been growing deeper, broader, purer ever since; and now it seems a part of my very life, inseparable from it, and had you not spoken, how could I have lived?"

"Thank God! My own, precious, darling wife!" I ejaculated, stretching out my arms as she came to the heart that claimed her. "I had seen you with my mind's eye, and known and loved you before we ever met, and this is only the outward acknowledgment of a long, long love, which was yours as soon as I first saw you. Counting time by heart-throbs, I have known you years, where I have known others only moments."

That there was music in our hearts and on our lips, the divinest that mortals ever hear, need not be told; for our love was real, grounded in the spirit, and sustained by all the laws of perfect, mutual affinity.

The new, strange thrill of heart meeting heart may be imagined, but not described. Suffice it to say, we were as blissfully forgetful of the world, and as luxuriously grateful and content, as two mortals could well be. It seemed to me that there could not be, on this whole earth, so perfect and felicitous a union of head, heart and soul, as was ours. We who had been separate and incomplete, because wanting each other, were now one in thought, purpose and feeling, each supplying and completing, in the other, what was lacking to a full, rounded-out, human entity. May not such a perfect, complemental union, such a satisfying





"I SHOULD BE SO HAPPY, FATHER, IF YOU WERE NOT HURT."—Page 481.

sense of wholeness as we enjoyed, give some slight hint of the united qualities in the and personality of Jesus, the perfect Man! In Him there was no lack. All His faculties and powers were in perfect proportion, perfect harmony, perfect union.

How long we stood, or when we sat down on a rustic seat in the arbor, I know not. It is enough to say that we went with glowing countenances and happy hearts into the presence of her father whom I now looked upon as my father. Theo had that moment stepped out of the room, designedly I think, and hand in hand we approached his bedside. He looked up inquiringly into first one face and then the other, and then a bright smile broke over his face like a wave of light.

"You need not say a word," he said. "I understand. It is all written in your faces; and may the light kindled there never lessen, but rather grow brighter and brighter as long as you live!"

"It is all right, then, is it? You give your full consent, Doctor Blentwood?"

"I do unreservedly. I cannot leave my beloved daughter in safer and more trusted hands. I shall now die content."

A great sob burst from Ethel's heart despite her efforts to control herself.

"I should be so happy, father," she said, bowing her head on his face, "if you were not hurt!"

"You must get well," I added, "and live with us. What a happy home we will create!"

"I have no doubt of it," he replied, stroking Ethel's head tenderly, and with moist eyes, "and it would be pleasant to spend there my declining years in Christian-literary work. But you must neither of you let my little illness interfere with your joys. I do not suffer, and am getting well fast, and shall soon have perfect health, never again to be impaired. I am to live as never before. You are not going to lose me, nor I you. A few days of separation, and we come together again."

Placing Ethel's hand in mine, and pressing them in both of his, he added :

"This is one of the most sacred and blessed moments of my life ; for I can almost see my angel wife making one of this group, joyfully giving her consent, and saying in her old sweet way, 'They will be just as happy as we have been ; so you have nothing to hinder you from coming home to me and Heaven.'"

Something in his cheerful mood and words comforted Ethel, and she raised her head and looked upon him, and then upon me, with a sweetness which seemed seraphic. Heaven seemed so near to her father that he murmured, as if talking to his wife, "Not quite yet. I have one more duty." Then turning to me he said :

"It would be very pleasant to me to see you married before I go. I can then leave the old home unbroken in number, and with its ideal blessedness preserved."

"It would be a source of great satisfaction all

my life to remember that you performed that ceremony for us," I answered, looking to Ethel for her consent.

She pressed my hand gently, and bowing, hid her face in her father's neck, and amid kisses and little sobs, whispered something in his ear which caused a sympathetic smile to ripple over his kindly face, as he said,—

"I am very, very thankful that I can leave you so happily matched. It is a union, I believe, sanctioned by Heaven, as was that of your mother and myself. I could not ask anything different. There is nothing in this world more beautiful than a perfect union. When shall it be legally consummated?"

"Whenever you and Ethel shall decide," I made answer, as I retired into another room, leaving them to consult together.

When I returned, it was decided that it was not safe to delay longer than necessary for the preparatory steps to be taken.

Looking at my watch, I remarked, "We have time, before my train starts, to acquaint Theo, our kind hostess, with the news of the day."

"Yes," the doctor interjected, thoughtful only of others, "go with him, and I will rest awhile; but first humor my weakness, if you call it such, by each taking my hand and joining your own. Now kiss each other as a pledge of eternal union. Now, Ethel, give that mutual kiss to me. It will be a comfort to carry the remembrance of it to Heaven and your mother, should anything happen

to prevent my seeing you united in marriage. There! Now go, and God bless you, my dear children. I cannot hold any more happiness just now."

Profoundly grateful for his cordial assent to our union, I turned as we were leaving his room, and waved back my adieus laden with emotions not to be expressed in words. He signaled an answering joy, and looked, as his words indicated, a very happy man, to be envied rather than pitied.

We found Theo in a restless state of expectancy. As soon as she saw our approach through the partially opened door, she flew to us like a bird, embracing us enthusiastically and exclaiming, "Do tell us what has happened! You both look as if you had reached the seventh heaven of bliss! Marvelous transformation! I scarcely know you! Your faces shine as Moses' must have done, when he came down from the mount! O, do keep on looking just as happy always! It glorifies you! It spiritualizes you! But please don't vanish out of my sight!"

She danced about us in raptures of delight, so unlike her quiet self, that I began to fear the recent strain had been too much for her. She drew us into the room, and, seating us on the sofa, looked at each of us alternately with eyes sparkling and cheeks aglow with excitement, as if she expected a "a feast of fat things."

"What is it?" she urged. "I must know all about it, you know."

As I did not speak immediately, she pressed Ethel's head close and lovingly to her shoulder, and, looking down into her eyes steadily for a moment, said softly :

"I see the whole, tell-tale affair in these beautiful soul-windows of yours, unobscured by even a curtain. I can look right into the living room, and see a throne erected, and love on the throne. He has conquered your two kingdoms and made them one, and that is why the signals of joy are hung out so plainly on your faces. I pray you, let me have a sister's place in this new kingdom, or I shall be lonely indeed."

"We cannot reign satisfactorily without you," I said, and Ethel added :

"You have been an angel of goodness to me ever since I have known you, and to sustain such a relation to you, in reality and not in name merely, will be a source of great comfort and satisfaction to me. I need just such a dear sister as you can be ; and I want you to be a sister to Elbert, too."

"O, you precious, darling Ethel ! What a dear prize you are !" Theo burst out, clasping and kissing her passionately.

They remained for some time locked in each other's embrace, mingling their tears of mutual joy and sympathy, when I remarked dolefully :

"I seem to be left out of all this good fellowship !"

They both laughed, and Theo asked Ethel, "Shall I kiss my new brother ?"

"Nothing would please me more, unless—unless it would be to kiss him myself also," and Ethel hid her blushes in Theo's lap.

Something approaching a gentle little frolic followed, which was a necessary relaxation of our overstrained nerves, and helped prepare us for the ordeal through which we were so soon to pass. It was mutually agreed and pledged, that Theo should regard herself, and be ever loved, esteemed, and confided in, by us, as a sister tried and true.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PREPARATORY.

THE next train found me whirling towards Graynoble, where I had first met Ethel. Thede drove me to the station, and on the way I explained to him the situation of affairs, as best I could. He was disappointed, but somewhat reconciled when he learned that the new arrangement was Theo's wish, and that the happiness and usefulness of all concerned would be subserved by it.

Arriving at Graynoble, I found Tom suffering from a slight attack of pneumonia, and he and Tot overwhelmed me with protestations of pleasure at seeing me, and with earnest questions about Dr. Blentwood and Ethel. Since I had come from under "de holy shadow ob de Blentwoods," Tom wished me to pray with him.

"It may please de great Oberseer," he said, with tears of joy glistening on his glad face, "dat I climb de golden stair jes, when good massa Blentwood do, so I kin hep him all de way up to glory. He be so use to me I kin sarve him better den any udder spirit, and if de soul ob my ole fiddle go wid me, I knows jes what ter play for to

chirrup him up on de long journey. An'—an' if he wanster rest on one ob dem stéps, and take anudder' look down hyyah at you and Ethel, I knows jes how ter hole 'im, for dese hands hab done it when he had de newrollogy and spinal megintis. Please tell de Lord 'bout dis, an' ax Him ef I mount be foun' worthy to go wid 'im. 'Twould happify my soul bery much."

I complied with his request, and read to him some comforting passages of Scripture, though neither I, nor Dr. Lightheart, whom I consulted, considered him critically ill at that time. As I shook hands with him, and bade him good-bye, he said:

"De prophetic vision am now sure to come to pass. Please tell Miss Ethel Ize gwine to take keer ob her fater, and so she needn't worry 'bout him."

I had only time, as I supposed, to catch the train, and so hurried away, examining my notebook and pockets, as I went, to make sure that I had done all my errands; but when seated in the car I began to wonder what Tom meant by "prophetic vision." After long and persistent retrospect I recalled the fact that on my first walk with the family at Dr. Blentwood's, Tom, whom we met, had hinted of a vision, which I might know would come to pass if I prayed at his dying bedside. "Tom evidently thinks he is going to die," I mused, "and so wishes me to understand that his vision of my bright future is to be realized." Did he mean *with* Ethel? The more I

recalled his language, the more I was satisfied that that was what he meant. It did not seem at all probable that I had come from Tom's death-bed, and so I dismissed the subject.

Seeing Miss Elison through the car window, I went out and learned that she had become Mrs. Stockmire the day previous. She expressed great regret that Dr. Blentwood, or myself, or both of us, as was her wish, could not have officiated at her wedding.

"Poor girl," I thought, "she will soon regret she ever married at all," and this feeling was confirmed as I caught a malicious glance from Stockmire, who had been watching us, and at that moment turned towards the ticket-office, and pretended not to see me. That look was a revelation. In an unguarded moment the hard, cold, hideous selfishness of the man had come to the surface, and his hating, revengeful spirit stood bare before me. His resumption of the soft veil of hypocrisy would now be of no avail to blind me, since I had seen the guilt in his heart reddening forth like the miraculous blood-stain of a murder.

The thought of what that man might do, in an evil hour of temptation, made me shudder. And yet, a man like Stockmire, living in externals, seldom or never looking within, doubtless took no note in his daily life of his ability to do evil, so effectually covered and polished over, as it was, by ornamental disguises and ostentatious humility.

On my journey back to the Thornton home, which contained what was most dear to me in life, I was tortured by the fear that some untoward event might occur to cut off the prize apparently so near at hand. It seemed too great and too good to be mine. My anticipations also were tempered and shadowed by the certain demise of Ethel's father, both because he was her father, and because he was a man after my own heart. "How can I fill the place of so grand a man, and relieve her from a life-long sadness?" I asked myself over and over. O, how I prayed that his nobility of mind, heart, and disposition might be mine!

The train did not move half fast enough, but as all things must come to an end, I alighted at last at the desired station, and, to my surprise and great satisfaction, found Thede in waiting.

He did not much expect me, he said, but Theo had insisted on his coming, and somehow he had fallen into the habit of obeying her, as she had a "knack of being pretty generally right."

Ethel was the first to greet me, telling me with tears how her father had failed, and how she had longed for my return, and how thoughtful and self-sacrificing Theo had been; and then stopping suddenly, and looking earnestly in my face, added pathetically:

"Do you know, Theo watched for you, and when she saw you and Thede far off, she hurried to me, and, taking my place, made me leave the sick room, that I might be the first to greet you,

though the dear girl was almost as impatient as I myself! Isn't she lovely? And aren't we fortunate in having such a friend, such a sister? Her frequent companionship will be so delightful! She will help me make home pleasant for you. Oh! we must have a home just as near heaven as we can make it, for dear father's sake, for your sake and for everybody's sake, and that means for the Master's sake."

"Yes, darling," I answered, clasping her in my arms; "but it will be heaven wherever you are; for, with my love for you there is always blended something above the human, something divine, an uplifting gratitude to the Master, which is an inspiration. I am so grateful for you I am filled with worship. We will make home-life a study, a loved science, the noblest art.

"Without you," she replied, "how could I bear up under the dreadful thought of separation from my dear, dear father! He says he shall go away without an anxious thought for me, so confident is he that you will more than fill his place. His restful faith in you, and trustful reliance on you, help me bear the thought of his loss."

"And it pledges me," I affirmed, drawing her closer to me, "most sacredly and irrevocably to a life-long endeavor to do, and to be, all that he believes me, and what the Master would have me; but, dearest, remember that I am very faulty, and do not expect me to fill your ideal, until you have patiently taught me."

Holding up a finger of warning, she darted off,

saying, "Sister Theo must now have the pleasure of seeing you, and directing your supper."

She had scarcely gone, when Theo came tripping softly through the open door, and greeted me as a sister should, in accordance with our tripartite agreement; and, escorting me to the dining-room, she presided at the table as cheerful and happy as thoughts of the near dissolution of Dr. Blentwood would allow.

I found the latter considerably changed during my absence, but still, bright, and much gratified to see me safely returned. As he was stronger in the morning, it was thought best to defer the intended ceremony till the next day.

That night, as I was sitting up with the doctor, the others having just retired, a telegram came to me in care of Theodore Thornton from Charley Lightheart, stating that he had been promoted, and would be ready for my services to-morrow morning.

"That means a wedding," I said to Thede, who brought the telegram. "He is probably on the night Pullman, and is proving what he said about marriage following promotion was not all a joke."

"That is the funniest fellow I ever saw," said Thede,— "full of it, boiling over with it, but an upright, downright, and all-through, royal good fellow, and I hope he will find in Carrie Horton the wife he deserves. The medical fraternity could not get much practice where he is. I almost think even Theo might get well in the constant sunshine of his hopeful, fun-loving disposition."

Next to you I would like him for a brother-in-law. But something has worked a miracle in Theo, and I laid the improvement to you. I don't quite understand her. I know she loved you, and yet she seems to take as much interest in your approaching marriage to Miss Blentwood, as if it were her own wedding. What does it mean, friend Bloomfield?"

"It means," I replied, taking Thede's hand warmly, "that your sister is a wise and thoroughly unselfish girl, taking infinitely more delight in making others happy than in any thought of good which might accrue to herself. She is a practical illustration of the joys of self-sacrifice made for the noblest ends. Ethel and I are very happy in each other, so much so we cannot conceive how we could be happier, and yet I believe Theo's joy is even keener and more glorious in the sight of Heaven than ours. I look upon her sometimes almost with envy for the divine quality, which glows and glistens through all her acts of self-renunciation. I know she is more delighted and more thankful in what she has done to bring Ethel and me together, than she ever was in the thought of marrying me; and so I feel I am only carrying out her wishes. She knew I loved Ethel before Ethel knew it, and it was her woman's intuition that discovered Ethel's love for me. She feels that it would be wickedly contending against the divine plan to hinder in the least, or even fail to help on, my marriage with Ethel. She believes in it with

all her heart. In fact, her happiness, as our friend, is bound up in it.

"I need not say how high Theo stands in my esteem. I admire and love her greatly as a sister, and so does Ethel, and we hope for the closest friendship with her and yourself through life. We owe much to you both, and as she is to let us regard her as a sister, will not you be to us a brother? The ties of a common friendship are not sufficient; we crave a closer relation, that we may share with you the esteem, the trust, the confidence, the freedom of a family united in the strongest bonds of attachment."

He was visibly moved. His big hand closed about mine with a grip which made my hand ache, and with that he left me alone.

This conversation had been carried on almost in a whisper in the room off from the sick chamber, and as soon as left to myself, I carefully looked in on the patient, when he opened his eyes. He beckoned to me, and, as I went to his bedside, he said:

"Heaven is beginning to open to me, and I am so thankful for this and for the sweet satisfaction I have in the thought that Ethel's future is safe in your hands, that I cannot sleep for very joy. I know not how to express my gratitude in words, and need your help. Will you not offer thanks for me?"

I slowly took his hand in both of mine, and, with a silent petition that I might meet his wants, I knelt by his side and poured out my heart to

Him, who can hear with answering grace when all earthly helps and sympathies fail. Though grieved to lose the father of my espoused wife, I caught something of his gratitude that the way from earth to Heaven was made for him so smooth and bright. When I arose, the good man pressed my hand and said :

“ You have told the Lord just what I wanted to tell Him, and now, with my feelings so adequately expressed, I think I can sleep. I thank you.”

He closed his eyes, and I retired to the adjoining room to think, and I thought deeper into life that night than ever before, and when morning came, much of earthly dross had passed from me, forever. Henceforth Heaven seemed nearer, clearer, dearer, as a real, actual advanced condition, and the opportunities of life more valuable as means to an end.

In the early hours of the morning, before anyone else was stirring, Ethel came and insisted that I take some sleep. She wished also to be alone with her father awhile ; and as the nuptial hour was fast approaching, when she would become a wife as well as daughter, I felt rather than reasoned out, the appropriateness and beauty of her wish. She was about to take the most momentous step in life ; and, as her father, until within a few short weeks, had absorbed all her love and confidence, her act was a thoughtful consideration, in perfect keeping with the absolute trust which had been mutual between them,

especially since the death of the mother, which threw upon him the tender watchfulness and care inhering in both parental offices.

But why should not every father be as tenderly sympathetic, and delicately appreciative, towards his children as the mother? And why should not a daughter, or son, be as free to confer with one parent as with the other? The frivolous and shallow-brained have marred society and retarded human progress too long. It is time that a deeper, broader, holier view of the sacred obligations involved in all the relations of life, pertaining to human welfare, should prevail.

These reflections, however, are the result of years of study, and not those occupying my mind on that supposed last morning of single blessedness. What were then my thoughts and feelings may, perhaps, be better imagined than described. My increasing veneration and love for Dr. Blentwood, the transcendent delicacy and tenderness of father and daughter in their attitude towards each other, my desire to minister to them both in all possible ways, together with questions of future happiness and usefulness with Ethel as the mistress of my home and my companion through life, were among the thoughts which kept me awake, and even invaded my dreams, when I at last fell asleep on that eventful morn—a morn which was to settle the destiny of at least two loving hearts for time, and, perhaps, in some respects, for eternity—who knows?

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WEDDINGS AND REUNIONS.

CHARLEY Lighthouse and Carrie Horton arrived about eight A.M., and insisted on my marrying them at once. "Dear old chum," Charley exclaimed, unable wholly to suppress his quaint love of fun, "I am to be metamorphosed, transmogrified into a staid old married man, and the transformation must be associated with you."

"I don't think," said Theo, "that you will lose your identity easily. I hope, at least, your effervescent spirits will stand the test of time and change; for society, and especially we invalids, need persons like you to drive off the blues. You are better than medicine, Mr. Lighthouse. If you were only a physician, you could prescribe bread pills and cure your patients by means of social visits."

"I thank you," Charlie responded, bowing low, "Your suggestion is a revelation of a possible new profession, which I may adopt, if I lose my position on the editorial staff."

At this juncture Dr. Lighthouse was announced, and, as Dr. Blentwood was asleep, he came into the long parlor, and in his presence and that of

the household, I united in holy wedlock my friend Charley Lighthouse and Carrie Horton. Charley had secured seats in the next Pullman train for New York, and so, scarcely touching coffee and cake, which Theo, in her usual thoughtfulness for everybody, had provided, they departed, full of hope and bright anticipations, leaving us with our immediate future clouded by thoughts of bereavement and mourning.

Dr. Blentwood awoke at ten o'clock, and was ministered unto by Dr. Lighthouse, when, bolstered up in bed, he received Ethel and me with a smile of satisfaction, as we went arm in arm to his bedside.

The marriage ceremony was unique. I have often said it would be worth a year's labor, could I recall, word for word, all that dropped from his lips, so entirely new and helpful were his ideas, falling sweet and sacred, and with healing balm on our waiting, sorrowing hearts. He seemed to stand, and as the sequel proved, did actually stand, at the open door of Heaven, and was as much inspired as any prophet old or new; and when he had finished, without premeditation, we instinctively knelt and received from him, with his hands on our bowed heads, a fervent "God bless you, my dear children."

His countenance was so radiant with spiritual light, he seemed like one talking to us from the very gate of glory, and to come down to earth only when he placed his signature to our marriage certificate. Then followed another scene, at the

very thought of which, tears unbidden blind my eyes, so that I can scarcely see to write—tears, however, not of vain regret, or unillumined sorrow, not even of sorrow of any kind, but on account of the very sublimity of what occurred, so full of the realities of the unseen world.

He spoke of his near departure, as if he was only to move from one good room into a better one, and a little in advance of us—that was all. "She is waiting for me," he said, pointing upwards, "and *we* will wait for you. What difference who goes first, since all must go? Time passes quickly even with the longest life. I have finished my course, and now have nothing really to detain me. School is out. I leave you happy in each other's love to complete your earthly schooling, and I have no anxiety for your future. A few more days of study and toil, of joy and perhaps of sorrow, and then we shall all be together again. It is as certain as that we are together now. I begin to know. Faith is changing to sight. This ceiling is not real. It lifts. It dissolves. I see through it. It is all open above me. There are flittings of angels' wings. They are hovering round. They have come to take me from this fleshly prison. Oh, what expanding freedom! Listen! What strains of entrancing melody! It comes nearer. It is a welcome. Life and Heaven! Oh, how beautiful! Yes, dear wife, I am coming. Glorious!—glorious!—glo—rious!"

The last word was a whisper. His eyes became

fixed heavenward, and, with one finger pointing up, he passed away, leaving a smile behind, as a farewell benediction.

"He is with mother now," Ethel whispered, a gleam of comfort lighting up her tearful face.

"And what a blissful reunion is theirs!" I answered, "I thank God I have known Dr. Blentwood. His memory will be a sweet and helpful presence as long as I live."

Ethel looked to me gratefully, and as she bowed her head on my shoulder, as if to say, "I have only you to cling to now," I whispered, "We have each other, and my whole heart is yours, Ethel, and let us thank God for this revelation we have witnessed, proving that your father, and my father also henceforth, still lives in the enjoyment of a blissful immortality, there to await and welcome us, when we have finished our course, as he has finished his."

Theo, with the peaceful smile of one who had seen a vision, came up and kissing us both, said simply, but joyfully, "He is not dead."

All this time Dr. Lightheart stood gazing at the silent form as if he would look through him into eternity, and, at last exclaimed, as he turned away, "Would to God I had that man's experience!"

I dwell a little on this scene, for I value the memory of it beyond all price, because it is an ever vivid proof of immediate blessedness, not only after, but at death, of a soul that has developed spiritually, and come up into harmony

with the higher life. I do not mean to say that every such soul will exhibit at death so manifest a revelation, but that the spirit-land cannot be wholly hid from the spiritually minded, whether making it known to others or not.

We had not expected Dr. Blentwood would leave us so soon, and his sudden demise was a great surprise to us; and yet his going was so divinely illumined, we did not seem to stand in the presence of death. There was nothing forbidding about it. We could not feel that he had really gone far—that we had in any true sense lost him. He was still Ethel's father and mine, only just now invisible to us—that was all. Sometimes, even to this day, Ethel and I, when sitting together, become conscious of his presence, and speak of it. If it be imagination, it is God-given imagination, and a great comfort to us. Whether he comes in any other sense than through memory or not, we know that he LIVES.





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